

she ate that burning heart out of his hand

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by [nbcravenstag](#)

Summary

Months after Hannibal Lecter surrendered to the FBI, Will Graham receives an impossible gift. But when Hannibal is involved, Will knows that these gifts come with a price, and maybe this time he can't save himself from wanting to accept what the devil offers. Maybe that's just fine.

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After a moment of silence, the door opens, and a pair of winter boots come into view as they crunch the snow underneath. Will holds his breath.

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It's Abigail Hobbs.

Notes

Hello again!

Sorry to those who may be seeing this story twice. I realized I posted it completely wrong, and I was unhappy with it, so I fixed it! This fic is going to be a rewrite of the second half of season 3 where Will gets to be Abigail's dad, and he has to confront the feelings he has for Hannibal much sooner than expected. Murder Husbands is absolutely Endgame, so don't you worry about that. The title is a line from Dante's first sonnet, which is what Hannibal quotes in gorgeous Italian in Antipasto! Anyway, I hope you guys enjoy this, it's going to be a bit of a behemoth, but I've been dying to post another multi-chapter fic.

I hope you're all well!

All my love,

Canary

Chapter 1

It's still cold in Wolf Trap. The snow isn't falling anymore like it had been earlier in the day; the night is calm and quiet, only the distant sounds of his dogs shuffling along the ground keeping it from being silent. Time has passed, but out of habit, Will listens for sirens, the rolling of car wheels across the drive, or the unmistakable sound of the crunching of snow under heavy footsteps. He doesn't hear any of those things, but the sick anticipation of such things is enough to cloud his thoughts and take him far away from his quiet house hidden in the nighttime fog.

Will stands on the front porch of his little farmhouse, nursing his third glass of whiskey of the night while he watches his pack mill about in the yard. He's going to bed after this, even if he really should shower first, but the thought of actually showering is exhausting, so he decides to wait until morning, bedsheets be damned. *I'll wash them tomorrow.* He promises, even though deep down he knows he probably won't.

He drains his glass in one swallow, gives himself a minute to calm the swirling feeling that follows, then whistles for his dogs, and makes his way inside to get ready for bed. Stumbling and fumbling for the light switch, Will somehow manages to get to the bathroom without incident. He brushes the whiskey from his teeth, knowing sober him will thank drunk him in the morning, and pulls off all layers but his boxers before crawling under the blanket on his bed.

Tonight, just like every night since, Will wraps himself in the thick blanket and tells himself it's because it's warm, and not because the fibers still hold a very light trace of Hannibal's cologne.

Three months and nine days. That's how long it's been since the night at the Vergers and the fall of the Chesapeake Ripper. It feels like longer sometimes, but Will dreams of it constantly. He dreams of confronting Jack Crawford in the yard, and the conflicting dread and relief he felt when Hannibal had stepped out from behind the house and gotten down on his knees, almost like he was in prayer.

"I want you to know exactly where I am. And where you can always find me."

But Will doesn't want to find him. Will wants to push all thoughts of Hannibal Lecter away until they're no longer there. He pushed Hannibal away for a reason. A good fucking reason.

So why do I feel like I can't breathe anymore?

Squeezing his eyes shut, Will throws the blanket onto the floor and covers himself up in the sheets instead. They're not warm enough, not really, but he's too drunk and too tired to get another blanket, and he's not going to cover up in one that reminds him of blood and wine and the feeling of being *alive*.

Will Graham lies there in his bed, in his little farmhouse, where he should feel free. He doesn't.

The next morning, just like every morning, Will wakes up with the blanket on his shoulders, having picked it up off of the floor at some point in the night. He grumbles to himself and kicks the damn thing off of his legs, irritable and mortified at having completed the pattern again.

A whine from his left pulls him out of his thoughts and he feels a smile on his lips. “Alright, I’m up.” He rasps, throwing out his hand for his phone. There’s a twinge of a hangover in his skull when the bright light hits his eyes, but what makes him wince is the time. 11:37. Ugh.

Two missed calls and a voicemail, all from Jack, come up in his notifications, and Will groans loudly. Ellie, who had been patient with him until now, whines again, and he turns over to face her. “Okay, darlin’.” He says apologetically, accent thick in his sleepy voice. He pushes himself up into a sitting position and feels around on the floor for his pajama bottoms and t-shirt. He dresses quickly, and as an afterthought, or a promise, he strips the sheets from the bed and tosses them on the floor in a pile.

He opens the door for the dogs and trudges to the kitchen to turn the coffee maker on while he listens to Jack’s voicemail.

“Will, call me when you can. It’s important.”

Of course, it is. When isn’t it?

Out of spite, Will waits until his coffee is done and he’s outside with the dogs before calling back. He’s given Jack enough of his time. Nonetheless, he dials the number, and Jack picks up almost immediately.

“Will!” He says in a tight but cheerful tone that is certainly too loud for Will’s patience. “I was just going to try to call you again. How are you?”

He grinds his teeth and sighs. “I was asleep.”

Jack hums. “Well. I don’t blame you. You need it.” He’s uncomfortable, that much is obvious, and it wears on Will more than it should this early in the morning. (Or, afternoon. Whatever.)

There’s a pause in the brief conversation, and Will scrubs a hand over his face. He’s too sober for this right now.

Miraculously though, Jack manages to break his awkward silence. “Listen, Will, um. I’ll cut to the chase, okay?”

Thank fuck. “Okay.”

“Are you going to be home tomorrow?”

Will laughs bitterly at the question. “Nowhere else for me to really be, Jack.” He replies because it’s true. Since Hannibal’s arrest, Will had been called in for help with the trial before

they deemed him an unreliable witness, and obviously, he wasn't going back to the FBI, so, Will Graham's life has become a mess of the same depressing routine of drinking, sleeping, thinking, and decidedly not leaving his home for any reason. Hannibal Lecter has been caught; there's no need in the world for Will Graham to leave his home.

Then, Jack's voicemail replays over in his head, and he absorbs the tone of Jack's voice: tired and uneasy but trying to sound normal, even though he's telling Will that the subject matter is important. "Why?" He adds.

There's another long pause before Jack speaks again, and it only sparks Will's anxious curiosity more.

"I have something to show you," Jack says eventually. "I won't have it until tomorrow morning. I'll be there at eleven."

A dark pit forms in Will's stomach at the words, and his heartbeat picks up. "Is it a warrant or handcuffs?" He jokes darkly, proud of how even his voice sounds.

Jack lets out a laugh and it sounds genuine, but it doesn't do much to ease the suspicion that's swirling around in Will's stomach. "Neither. Just be up. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Bye, Jack."

The line goes dead, and Will lets out a heavy sigh. He slips the phone into his pocket and tries to focus on his dogs, but the conversation with Jack has piqued his interest.

If the FBI isn't coming to arrest him, what could be so important that Jack needs to come to Wolf Trap to show him something? Why are the details so vague? *"I won't have it until tomorrow."* What's "it"? Will knows that if it were anything to do with Hannibal Lecter, Jack wouldn't have hesitated to tell him.

Briefly, he toys with the idea that the BAU has tracked Chiyoh, but quickly dismisses it, as that would definitely be more urgent for Jack Crawford and Company. Bedelia du Maurier could also be another possibility, perhaps she's revealed something, but this also seems unlikely, so eventually, Will gives up trying to guess the intentions of the FBI.

Throughout the day, he continuously circles back, because curiosity is killing him, but also because he knows whatever it is Jack is bringing him, it has the potential to be life-changing, and not necessarily in a good way.

"We're bringing on a consultant to help with the psychological profile. A psychiatrist." He remembers Jack telling him one day. *"His name is Hannibal Lecter, he's close with Alana Bloom. You'll be meeting him today too. Try to play nice."*

"Only if he does."

Hannibal hadn't played nice, not that he ever had, but then again, neither had Will.

That day, because the powers that be decided it was fate that the two of them meet, Jack Crawford had brought Will and Hannibal into each other's orbits, and within weeks, Will

Graham's life exploded into color and blood and fire. The Will Graham that had barely lived beyond his own shadow before Hannibal Lecter showed up doesn't exist anymore.

Around evening time, Will decides to try to stop thinking altogether, because the more he thinks about Hannibal, the deeper the ache in his chest grows.

The next morning, anxious energy is what propels him out of bed. When the alarm goes off at ten, he's instantly awake and throws the covers back off of his body so that he can let the pack outside and make coffee. His hands are trembling around the toothbrush and he's not even really sure why, but he feels a twinge of irritation. *Get your shit together. You're not being arrested, and Hannibal is in prison. Your life is boring now.*

As if hearing his internal conflict (and finding it to be the funniest thing in the universe), Winston lets out a soft snort.

Will glares at him in the bathroom mirror but fights a smile afterward. *Maybe Jack's bringing you a dog.* He thinks.

He knows it's ridiculous, but the idea is still entertaining.

When Jack pulls up in the driveway a little over thirty minutes later, Will is surprised to see that he's not alone. The black SUV has tinted windows that are just dark enough to see the silhouette of the passenger, but all discernible details are blurred and blocked.

The vehicle parks and Jack exits the driver-side door, leaving the passenger inside. Will's eyebrows knit together in a silent question to Jack, but the man gives nothing away. Will turns his attention to the passenger side briefly, trying to get a hint on the unknown occupant. They're on the small side, most likely a woman, and Will's mind immediately jumps to Chiyoh. It couldn't be Alana, and it makes no sense for it to be Bedelia or even Margot Verger.

Jack starts moving forward, catching Will's attention. The two share a look as Jack approaches him, and Will knows he must look hopelessly confused, but instead of speaking, Jack nods at him, lowers his eyes, and brushes past Will so that he can enter the house.

Sure, just help yourself, Jack. Will thinks pointedly, definitely more than annoyed. He turns to glare but notices that Jack is looking at the SUV. More specifically, the passenger side, where his guest is still sitting. After acknowledging them, he nods at Will once more and goes inside, shutting the door behind him.

Without much else to do, Will turns back to the SUV, eyes fixed on the figure in the passenger seat.

After a moment of silence, the door opens, and a pair of winter boots come into view as they crunch the snow underneath. Will holds his breath.

The SUV door slams shut, there's a brief flash of auburn hair, and the entire world comes screeching to a halt because it isn't Bedelia du Maurier, Alana Bloom, Margot Verger, or Chiyoh with her smiling rifle.

It's Abigail Hobbs.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Hello! I changed Abigail's age a bit from canon. In canon she's actually 19 when she dies, but I made her a little younger. In this AU, she was 17 when she first met Will and Hannibal, making her 18, almost 19 now. Just to clear that up a bit.

This chapter explains how Abigail survived, and we get to see more Dad!Will because lord please let that man have a murder child. He deserves it.

Canary

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

For a long time, they don't do anything but stare at each other, and Will can't take his eyes off of her face because the last time they saw each other, Hannibal Lecter slit her throat in front of his eyes and he never even saw her body in the hospital. He remembers the bag of ashes with Abigail's name on it sitting in the morgue, he remembers running his fingers over the label with tears in his eyes as his mind echoed with the sound of her choked-off breaths, heavily clogged with blood, in the darkness of the kitchen...

She looks so *beautiful* though. Her hair is longer than he remembers, and it's blowing slightly in the breeze, showing off the scar tissue where her ear should be. Her eyes are bright and clear and not milky with death, and on her throat is the imprint of not one but *two* scars, overlapping each other on her alabaster skin. She looks so real, and so, so beautiful, and so *alive* but there's no way it's possible that Abigail is here because she's *dead*. Hannibal Lecter murdered her, and she's not supposed to be here, but she *is*.

He must be losing his mind again.

"A-am I hallucinating?" He chokes, his voice sounding nothing like his own.

Abigail smiles at him, and it's so achingly familiar that he's almost convinced that he hasn't lost his shit completely. The wound in his heart that had still been bleeding after all of this time starts bleeding again, but this time, the feeling is warm and welcome because somehow, by some grace of *fucking God*, Abigail Hobbs is alive. Will's heart is thrashing against his ribcage, and each beat is a mantra of *oh please, please, please*.

"I'd have to be hallucinating too," Abigail says, and his knees almost buckle with the sound. Her voice sounds like golden wind chimes and it's the most beautiful thing he's ever heard. She cocks her head and her smile turns into a playful smirk, but there are tears in her eyes when she asks him: "Can you catch somebody's crazy?"

Will Graham lets out a laugh that sounds like he's drowning or being strangled, but he doesn't feel like he's dying. Not this time. He stares into the face of the girl who he's cherished and missed for so long, and for the first time since Hannibal was arrested, he feels transcended.

And suddenly they're running towards each other through the snow. Somewhere along the way, Will's strength fails him and he collapses to his knees just as the warm heat of Abigail's body collides with his. It's too brutal to be called a hug, but Will is sobbing and so is Abigail, and together they fall to the Virginia earth in a locked embrace.

He holds her tight against him, one arm wrapped around her back, the other around her shoulders so that he can cradle her head against his collarbone. Her hands are fisted in his jacket, clinging to him like she's afraid he'll disappear. "I don't—I can't—I don't understand, how..." He's stuttering and can't form a sentence, but he knows she understands. Will pulls away, cupping her face in his shaking hands. "How are you *here*, baby?" The term of endearment falls off his tongue so naturally that he doesn't even realize he's said it until it's already out.

Abigail lets out another sob and collapses against him again. "*I'm so sorry, Will.*" She cries, and his heart breaks all over again because Abigail Hobbs has nothing to apologize for. Not to him.

Will tightens his arms around her even more (he's sure it must be hurting her, but she's not making any effort to stop him), and he rocks her back and forth. He's sure he's not dreaming now, no matter how unbelievable this whole thing is, and he's not going to waste the second chance. He holds her and rocks her, occasionally making soothing sounds to calm her. He whispers to her, telling her how much he missed her, how sorry he is, and how happy he is to see her.

It should be odd, considering how their two last meetings went, but somehow holding Abigail close feels almost impossibly right, even though this is the first time they've ever held each other like this. Briefly, he wonders if Hannibal ever hugged her in all that time they had together.

We are her fathers now. We have to serve her better than Garrett Jacob Hobbs. He hears Hannibal's voice in his mind just as Jack Crawford steps out onto the porch again to watch them.

Will stares him down for a moment, feeling slightly amused when Jack shuffles his feet uncomfortably and drops his gaze from the reunion. Will buries his face in Abigail's hair and presses a kiss to the top of her head. *I will*, he vows silently. *I'll serve her better than you did too.*

After a few more minutes, they pull apart and get to their feet. Will wipes away the wetness from her cheeks with a gentle brush of his thumbs, then kisses her forehead once again just because he can. Her smile is wobbly, but genuine and grateful, and it makes him smile too. How can he not, when she's alive and back beside him where she belongs?

But, he knows that there's something he needs to take care of before he can indulge too deeply in this new opportunity, so he tells Abigail to go inside and get warm and be with the dogs, although he really doesn't want to separate from her for even a moment.

She seems just as reluctant, if the flash of anxiety in her eyes is anything to go by.

"It's alright. I just need to talk to Jack." He assures her in a gentle voice that's only reserved for her.

Finally, Abigail nods and hurries up the porch steps, actively avoiding Jack's gaze.

Once the door is closed and Abigail is inside, he signals to Jack and the two go inside Will's barn. He doesn't know how loud this conversation is going to be, but he doesn't want Abigail to have to hear any of it, so he rounds on Jack the moment they get inside.

"You told me she died." He spits in Jack's face. "You looked me in the eye and told me she was dead, and I believed you. How could you, *you*, of all fucking people, lie to me like that?"

Jack Crawford looks genuinely chastised and guilty, but Will can also feel the anger and indignation coming off of him in waves, as it always does when Will challenges him. "Will —" He starts to say.

Oh, but Will Graham isn't done yet. He cuts Jack's apology off immediately. "How many people knew, Jack?"

"Will."

"How many people knew she survived?" He's close to shouting now, seething with rage he can barely control at having been lied to again. "Does Alana know?"

"No, she doesn't. We're keeping it quiet. The surgeons who saved her life know, so does the protection detail in the safe house. Kade Prurnell. A few lawyers. And, of course, Abigail's psychiatrist."

"And you."

"And me."

The admission melts some of the anger away, but it quickly turns to sadness, betrayal, and resentment. Exhaustion hits him like a truck, and he takes a few steps back out of Jack's space. There's a question burning in his mind, and he still has things to say to Jack, but he needs to know. "How did she survive?"

There's a pause, then Jack lets out a sigh and slips his hands into his pockets. "ERT got there just in time. They thought she was dead, but there was a very faint pulse. She flatlined twice —" Will flinches, his stomach dropping out from underneath him, but Jack continues talking. "—but they got her back in the ambulance. Several transfusions later, they had her in stable condition, and after about two weeks, they moved her to the safe house." He pauses again,

curling and uncurling his fists. “She was in another coma for a while, but... obviously she woke up.”

“When did she wake up?”

Jack offers a sympathetic smile. “You’re not going to like it.” *No shit, Jack, really?* Will thinks. “She woke up right before you got discharged from the hospital.”

That is what makes Will’s head snap up in attention. All of the fury he had pushed away comes rushing back, bubbling in his blood like a pot of water on the stove. Abigail Hobbs woke alone in an unfamiliar FBI safe house after having her throat slit for the second time in less than six months. He thinks about the way she had clung to him in the driveway, as desperate for a friendly touch or a familiar face as he had been and his anger only grows. “Almost a *year ago?*” He shouts, his voice echoing off of the walls. “And how long were you planning on keeping this from me?”

Jack’s face turns hard as stone at the seething, accusing tone that’s come back to Will’s voice. “As long as I needed to.” He replies.

Briefly, Will has the image of Jack’s corpse hanging from his barn’s rafters flash through his mind as the rage simmers under his skin.

Will Graham is not Abigail Hobbs’ father. He knows that. In fact, having known what it was like to be Garrett Jacob Hobbs, he’s very grateful for that fact. But, that doesn’t change the instinctive, almost primal urge he has to love and protect Abigail, just like one of his dogs would care for their pups. Hannibal had seen it; hell, he’d probably *smelled* the paternal instincts taking over his brain every time Abigail was in the vicinity. (Of course, he had, he mentioned it didn’t he? *Feeling paternal, Will?*) At the time, Will had chosen to ignore Hannibal’s eyes on him every time Will would put himself in between Abigail and any strangers that got too close, glued to her side like a sentinel. Hannibal had known from the beginning that Abigail was a weakness of his, but also something he would fight to protect. He isn’t her father, but Abigail Hobbs became his daughter through love, bloodshed, and the Devil’s influence. However, because Jack Crawford, the head of the BAU, is oblivious to the fact that Will Graham would burn the world down if his child asked, he has no real understanding of how much danger he is currently in.

“What, so you could see what side I chose first?” He hisses through his clenched teeth.

“Make me believe Abigail is dead no matter how much it hurts me, just to see what I would do? Wind me up and watch me fucking go?”

“Will, you have to understand—”

“You know who *else* did that, Jack? You should know because you just locked him up in a prison cell.”

This time, Jack’s expression turns colder than when he had watched Will from the other side of an interrogation table because he believed Will to be a murderer. “Are you comparing me to Hannibal Lecter?” He demands in a tone that is clearly his *I did not just hear that* tone.

It's a low blow, but Will no longer cares. His loyalty and friendship to Jack are long gone, and he doesn't care about hurting anyone's feelings. "What you've done is no better than what Hannibal did."

He expects Jack to yell back in his face, but he's surprised when Jack just lets out a very tired, resigned sigh, and reaches out to put his hand on Will's shoulder. He almost shakes it off, but something about Jack's expression makes him stop. "Understand, Will, that you were not the only person I was hiding her from. I had to make sure Hannibal was caught or killed before I could move on this."

In an instant, most of the fight goes out of Will's tense body. Of course, Jack had to keep the news from reaching Hannibal Lecter. He thinks he killed Abigail Hobbs and doesn't feel any remorse over it because she was a reward for Will's loyalty, and Will betrayed him. If Hannibal found out that not only had he failed in killing Abigail, but that she had been restored to Will while Hannibal was sat to rot in the BSHCI, fuck only knows what he would do. Will had witnessed Hannibal Lecter drowning in the cold loss of betrayal and had two very large scars to prove it.

Another thought begins to take over, and Will relaxes his posture. "So," He begins, working hard to keep the anger out of his voice. "What happens to Abigail now? Last I heard she was still on the hook for Nick Boyle's murder and her father's crimes too."

Jack suddenly looks like he's aged ten years. "All potential charges against her have been dropped." He says as if the words tasted like vinegar.

Will's heart skips a beat. Instinctively, he feels a smug sense of pride for Abigail; he senses that Hannibal taught her how to be a better liar and that she had taken it to heart.

"Abigail Hobbs didn't kill Nicholas Boyle. Hannibal Lecter did."

Oh. Oh of course. Amused delight is threatening to make a smile curve his lips, but he pushes the urge away.

Jack is thankfully oblivious to his joy, as he blunders on. "She told us that Hannibal was the man on the phone, which we already knew. She said when she confronted him, he didn't threaten her outright, but she was scared enough to keep quiet. Later, he confessed to having been the one to kill both Marissa Shurr and Nick Boyle. He wanted to frame her for the murders just like he did with you." Will winces without really meaning to. "He got her to push Alana Bloom out of the window, which she's expressed a large amount of remorse for. Apparently, Lecter had been also heavily drugging her to brainwash her like he did with du Maurier, which was evident in the tox screen we got while she was in the hospital. But he wasn't the first one to drug her either."

Will's mind is reeling. *You clever, clever girl.* "And... Garrett Jacob Hobbs' murders?"

"She denied all involvement." Jack replies in the same bitter tone. "She confirmed her dad always came with her on the orientation trips, they would have a motel room, and that her father would drug her food so that she would sleep while he went out to stalk his victims. We found several bottles of sedatives among Hobbs' things, all prescribed to him."

“She knew he was drugging her?”

“Not according to her.” Jack says. “Abigail stated that she had never done any sort of drug besides marijuana at a few parties. She didn’t realize she was being drugged until she was locked in Hannibal Lecter’s basement. It took him drugging her for her to realize the effects were familiar.” He sighs and seems to deflate.

Will knows he should be disgusted with Abigail’s lies, but he can’t bring himself to feel guilty about the beaming pride that is filling his body with warmth. It’s the kind of pride that only a father can feel because he’s felt it before from other people.

His own father, Beau Graham, was a gentle giant. Although he was only a little taller than Will, years of being a sailor, working on engines and docks, and all manner of trade work had made him broad and strong. Will had inherited his “resting bitch face” (as Beverly had put it) from his father, so for his entire adult life, Beau Graham appeared as a large, angry man usually covered in sea salt and motor oil. But Beau was never an angry man. He was always gentle with his easily overwhelmed and extremely sensitive son, right up until the day his heart gave out when Will was twenty-five. Even if he never told his son how proud he was, or how much he loved him, Will felt it. He felt it every day.

It’s the same feeling he got when seeing Abigail through her father’s eyes. Although Garrett Jacob Hobbs’ love was twisted and violent, his pride was genuine. Hobbs had been proud of his daughter’s contribution to their hunt, but he was also proud of the young woman his daughter was becoming, just like any other father would be.

It was the same feeling Will had gotten when he realized that Abigail had survived by killing Nick Boyle—although he had felt sick with himself afterward for the thought. Not anymore, though. Abigail had lied to the FBI to free herself after surviving Hannibal Lecter. Will Graham is proud of her. It’s as simple as that.

Jack catches his gaze, but Will knows he looks perfectly blank, giving nothing away. “She meets with an FBI-appointed psychiatrist, Dr. Rebecca Mills, three times a week, and Dr. Mills has cleared her. Abigail Hobbs is a victim.”

“So, she’s... she’s free, then?”

“Not entirely. We need to keep her available for more questions if we need it, but as of now, she’s been cleared.” Jack purses his lips, but Will realizes quickly that it’s not because he’s bitter about Abigail getting acquitted before even getting a trial.

Will continues to watch him but allows Jack to speak on his own.

“She asked about you. It was the first thing she did, actually.”

That he hadn’t been expecting, but the warmth that fills his body is enough to bring a smile to his lips.

“She woke up, and still had a tube in her throat of course, so she couldn’t speak, but they gave her a whiteboard and the first thing she asked about was if you had survived.” Jack says

quietly, like he's suddenly exhausted by the weight of the secret he's been holding back for almost a year. "I thought she was going to try to jump out of the moving car when we pulled up to the porch and saw you outside."

The lump rising in Will's throat and the prickling sensation in his eyes somehow become more intense. Abigail Hobbs, the girl who had her throat slit twice and survived both times had woken up and her immediate thoughts had gone to Will. He tries to wrap his head around it, but the emotions are too raw, and not having Abigail by his side suddenly seems completely unbearable.

"Thank you, Jack." He says, solemn but genuine. "Thank you for bringing her."

Jack nods in the gruff way he has for when he's feeling awkward.

"You're still an asshole for not telling me."

This time, Jack laughs boisterously, throwing his head back so that the sound echoes off of the walls. "Oh, you're so lucky you don't work for me anymore. I'd have you doing admin work for a month for that comment." There's no bite to the words though, and Will snorts in response.

There isn't much of a goodbye between them. Jack gives him an almost fatherly pat on the shoulder (which Will has to summon all of his self-control to not shake off) and tells Will to call him if Abigail wants to go back to the safe house before getting back into the car and driving away.

Will watches him leave down the drive, but once his car disappears, he turns back to the house and sees Abigail's face in the window. They lock eyes and share a soft smile.

Without sparing the outside world another glance, Will escapes back inside his farmhouse with a warm feeling in his heart, knowing his child is safe and home, and that no one will ever separate them again as long as he's alive to stop it.

Ten minutes later, they're sitting at the kitchen table, each with a mug of tea, surrounded by his pack and the safety of his own walls. Abigail's cheeks are still red from crying, but she looks visibly more relaxed than she had in Jack's presence.

"You lied." Will says, though it isn't an accusation.

Abigail shrugs and takes a sip of her tea. "They wouldn't let me go if I didn't. I wasn't going to survive a second time just spend my life in prison for something I wanted no part of to begin with."

Pride blossoms under Will's ribcage again. "You even convinced your psychiatrist."

"This one is much easier to fool than my last one." She retorts, though there is an edge to her words. She bites at her lip, no doubt thinking about Alana Bloom.

“You did what you had to do.” Will tries.

Abigail’s eyes dart up to catch his gaze. “I know.” She murmurs. “I don’t regret all of it.”

Will leans across the table to get closer. “What do you regret?” He asks.

“Pushing Dr. Bloom out of the window. Involving Marissa. Digging up Nick Boyle’s body in the first place.” She bites at her lip again and drops her eyes.

He watches Abigail shrink back into herself, and quickly reaches to grab onto her hands. *You’re safe here.* He thinks toward her. *I will keep you safe.*

Abigail raises her head and her eyes are watery again, causing a tight twist of pain through his chest. “I regret leaving you behind at the cabin.” She says, her voice wavering.

Will is floored, and his chest tightens even further.

“I never should have left you there. Everything was so confusing, and I didn’t know who to trust, and I was so scared, but if I hadn’t run away, none of this would have happened.” Tears are streaming down her face freely as she speaks, and she doesn’t bother to wipe them away. “I didn’t know if you were really sick or just losing it, and I was scared, but I never should have left you there. I’m so sorry, Will, I’m so sorry.” She pulls her hands away and buries her face in them instead. Her shoulders are shaking with the force of her sobs while she curls in on herself.

The apology brings him back to life like a switch being flipped. “No,” He interrupts, getting out of his seat to kneel on the floor by her feet. He pulls her hands away from her face with one hand and uses the other to brush at the wetness on her cheeks. “Please don’t apologize to me. You don’t have to be sorry for anything.”

She gives him a disbelieving look. “But I left you there and you ended up in prison because Jack Crawford thought you killed me!”

Will shakes his head. He feels raw and torn open from the idea that Abigail blames herself for Hannibal’s doing. “I don’t blame you for running. You were scared, and you’re right, I was losing my mind. You had no idea what I could have been capable of, because I’m not even sure what I could have been capable of.” Deep in Will’s heart, he truly believes that he would have never been able to actually hurt Abigail, but a belief is not fact, and given his encephalitis, add it together with the influence of the fucking Chesapeake Ripper, it’s not a difficult leap to make that he could have been violent in that state.

The thought is an unpleasant one, and he forces himself to forget about it for the sake of comforting his child. “I’m the one that should be apologizing to you.” He says this softly, giving her hand a soft, comforting squeeze. “I couldn’t protect you. I failed you in that aspect, and I’m sorry.”

Abigail lets out a soft, humorless laugh. “If I can’t apologize for things out of my control, neither can you.”

Her directness makes him chuckle. “Fine, I’ll find something else to apologize for.”

This time, her laugh is genuine, and Will can’t help the way his knees feel weak at the sound. It’s another reminder that Abigail is actually alive and well, and he knows he’d do anything to keep that happiness for her.

But, as if on cue, Abigail’s face falls again, and she suddenly looks so young and frightened that it makes all of the happy thoughts in his mind evaporate instantly. “What is it?” He asks her carefully, like he’s speaking to a wild animal.

“Can I stay with you?” She blurts out.

Will freezes, his breath catching in his throat. *She wants to stay here? With me?* His heart begins pounding. It’s everything he wants, but the idea of *actually* being able to keep her with him where he knows she’s safe is overwhelming, and he can’t bring himself to speak.

Abigail squirms under his gaze, and he kicks himself mentally for it, but she doesn’t let him speak. “You’re the only person who knows the truth about me, about my... what I did with my dad. You’re the only person who understands my experiences with Hannibal because you understood him, and I understand you, or at least, I’m beginning to. You’re the only person I trust, Will.” She lets out a shaky breath, tears threatening to fall once again. “You’re the only person that I feel safe with.”

And *that* is the force that ignites a fire in his blood. “Yes.” He tells her, cradling her face in his hands.

“Yes?” She utters meekly.

“Yes, of course, you can stay. You can stay as long as you want.” *Forever, if you want.* He thinks as he presses a kiss to her forehead.

A sob rips out of his daughter’s chest, and she surges forward to collapse in his arms again. He holds her tight, keeping her safe in his arms, occasionally making soothing noises in his throat as he rocks her. *I’m curious whether either of us can survive separation.* He thinks back on his words to Hannibal in the Uffizi and relishes the fact that the words apply to Abigail Hobbs too. A bright young girl who has survived too many monsters for one lifetime, who is just as alone in this world as he is, now that Hannibal is gone.

“It’s going to be awkward sometimes, you know I’m shit at talking.” He whispers to her. “But I’ll take care of you. There’s a bedroom and bathroom on the second floor that you can have. We’ll make it work. I’ll keep you safe.”

Abigail squeezes him tighter, and he doesn’t let her go. He’s not going to let her go ever again.

Comments give me life

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hello again! So, I'm a little sad that this fic isn't doing as well as I hoped it would, but I'm going to keep posting. I know this seems like it's starting slow, but I wanted to explore a little more of Will and Abigail's relationship growing as time goes on, but trust me, it will not be that way forever. The next chapter is going to be much darker.

Anyway, I hope you guys enjoy this, and I love you all.
Canary

Oddly enough, the transition was much easier than Will had anticipated. Following their heart-to-heart, Will had called Jack to tell him that Abigail would be staying with him indefinitely, and they made arrangements to bring what very few belongings she had to his home. The upstairs bedroom, which had been barren and mostly used for storage purposes, was cleared out, and Abigail made herself at home.

Additionally, their relationship became stronger every day. Will had been surprised at how easy it was to live with a teenager under his wing, but he now knows that it's just Abigail herself. His child is bright, inquisitive, sarcastic, and sweet, and the two move around each other in a shared space without even so much as an argument over dishes. They cook together, share meals daily, and spend quiet nights catching up on the lists of TV shows they've both accumulated. (That trend began with Abigail, who had dropped her fork in horror when Will told her that he hadn't seen *Sherlock* yet, to which she had dragged both him and their breakfast to the sofa to stream it.) The dogs love her, especially Ellie, who makes a point to sleep on Abigail's bed every single night.

She asks him to take her fishing with him, and so they do that too on a warm Sunday morning. He teaches her about knots and casting lines, and although they both end up more soaked than anything else, the beaming smile he receives when she catches a fish on her own is worth the soggy clothes. For the first time since Hannibal went to prison, Will feels optimistic.

Then, of course, one month into their shared life, Jack Crawford has to ruin it all.

"Are you out of your fucking *mind*?" He shouts into the receiver, not trying to be quiet.

Abigail, who is still sitting on the sofa watching a movie, glances up in shock at his sudden outburst.

"Watch how you speak to me, Will." Jack growls back. "It's been over a month. Kade wants to move on this, and I have to agree with her that this needs to happen."

“Yes, Jack, a *month*. After everything she’s been through, don’t you think it’s a *little* soon to be throwing her to the goddamn wolves?”

“It’s not about what I think, Will, it’s out of my hands. But, if you want my honesty, no. Whether we do this now or later, it’s going to be a media circus. May as well get it over with so that you can get on with your lives, yes?”

Will has to grit his teeth to stop himself from shouting again. Fucking Kade Prurnell and the fucking FBI at its finest. He takes a deep breath in through his nose and releases it slowly. “You’re won’t be doing anything until I speak to Abigail about it and we decide how we’re going to handle the aftermath.” He manages to sound much calmer than he really feels. He turns back to Abigail and sees her eyebrows furrowed in confusion and concern, and he scrubs a hand over his face. “There’s going to be a fallout, Jack, and I’m not going to do anything that could put her safety at risk.”

“I wouldn’t ask you to do anything different, Will. Bring her down to the Bureau tomorrow morning and we’ll talk about it more.”

“I’m not leaving her alone in a room with you and Kade Prurnell. That is non-negotiable.”

Jack sighs in a long-suffering type of way. There’s a radiating tension coming from his end of the phone, and Will knows he’s trying hard to not lose his temper either. “Kade will not be here. It will be just the three of us. Will, I understand your feelings on this, I really do.”

“No, I really don’t think you do.” He snaps back. He runs his fingers through his hair for what seems like the thousandth time, and he knows he probably looks like he just got electrocuted. “Fine. I’ll talk to you later, Jack.”

“Alright, Will.”

He ends the call with a little more force than necessary and clenches and unclenches his hands a few times to expel some of the energy in his veins. He needs to calm down to have this conversation with his kid, he knows he does.

“Will?” Comes the timid voice from behind him.

He releases the breath he had been trying to hold and turns to face the girl on the sofa. “Yeah. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to get so loud.” Slowly, he turns and settles back down onto the couch, angling his body towards her.

Abigail mirrors him, drawing her knees up and wrapping her arms around them so that she’s in a ball beside him. “What’s happening?”

“The FBI wants the world to know that you survived.” He says simply. He’s not going to sugarcoat it or hide it. “Kade Prurnell is ordering it. Jack wants us to come down to the Bureau tomorrow morning to discuss the details.”

Her eyes get wide. “Oh.” Her voice sounds so distant, and when she drops her gaze completely, his heart beats painfully in his chest. They had been so happy until this point, and

seeing her look anxious and unsure makes him even angrier at Jack Crawford.

“Abi.” He puts a hand on her arm and squeezes lightly. “Look at me for a minute.” It takes her a minute, but eventually, she does look up and meet his eyes, though hers are brimming with tears that she’s trying really hard not to shed. “We knew that this was going to happen eventually. I’d prefer it not to, but we’ll get through it. I’m not going to let anything happen to you, you know that, right?”

Abigail nods, but bites at her lip. “You don’t think they’d try to make me go somewhere else, would they? Like, I’m eighteen, they can’t force me, right?”

Will shakes his head. “I wouldn’t let that happen, Abi. I’m not going to let anyone take you anywhere that you don’t want to go.” He means it too. If Hannibal Lecter couldn’t keep Abigail Hobbs from him, Jack Crawford and the FBI don’t stand a fucking chance.

Abigail nods again, her bright eyes filled with trust, and when she reaches for him, he pulls her close and tucks her head under his chin. Truthfully, Will knows there’s a possibility that someone somewhere could try to make the argument that her care would be better handled by a foster family or a guardian that hasn’t been accused (albeit acquitted) of serial murder, but Will Graham would never allow them to try, even if a legal case was presented. No, he will fight for her. He’ll fight tooth and nail, with a legal team and his bare fucking hands if he has to. And, if the worst truly were to happen, they would simply leave. It would take preparation, as he’s not as used to fleeing the country as Hannibal, but he would do it if he had to. He would do it for his daughter in a heartbeat.

“Thank you both for coming.” Jack says, closing the door to his office after them.

Will doesn’t respond as he leads Abigail to the desk with a hand resting protectively on her back. He can feel her anxiety, despite how well she really hides it in public (or really, how well she hides it from anybody that isn’t him). She’s been more or less a silent shadow all last night and this morning, following him from room to room. Will is well aware of how afraid she is of being separated, and he can tell even now that she’s struggling.

He slides his own chair ever so slightly to the right so that he’s closer to her, and he sits down. Jack takes his own seat and looks the both of them over. “You both look good. How is everything going?”

“It’s been good.” Will replies, sneaking a look at Abigail, who smiles nervously in response.

There’s a painfully awkward pause where clearly, Jack is hoping for elaboration, but he realizes quickly he isn’t getting anything, and he leans back. “I do apologize for the urgency on this, but they’re being pretty insistent. Abigail, I know you have reservations about this, but I want to make this transition as easy as I can for you, so, whatever you would like, we can try to make it work.”

Abigail steels herself and looks at Jack for the first time since they’ve arrived. Her hands are trembling in her lap, and she clenches them into fists. “I just want to stay with Will. Can you

guarantee that?”

Jack stares back in bewilderment, and Will tries to hide his grin. Abigail’s fearlessness has always been something he admired about her, and to hear it directed at the head of the Behavioral Analysis Unit of the FBI makes him beam with pride. Actually, if he’s honest, it reminds him of Hannibal a little bit. He decides not to examine that too closely.

“Will is already taking over your guardianship,” Jack explains. “If that—”

“That’s not just what I mean.” Abigail cuts him off sharply. “Can you guarantee that when this comes out, no matter what any social worker or lawyer tries to say, I will not be taken somewhere else?”

“That’s our condition, Jack.” Will adds, reaching out and putting a hand on Abigail’s arm. “People are going to talk, and obviously there’s nothing we can do about that, but we want to make sure that Abi isn’t going to be forced into foster care or another guardianship with a stranger she doesn’t know. You promise us protection from that, and we’ll cooperate with the story.”

Jack’s head volleys back and forth like he’s watching a tennis match. His confusion and irritation at being ordered around is plain as day and only slightly amusing. He sighs like all of the world is coming to an end but finally nods. “Yes, I can promise that.” He says wearily.

Abigail sags in relief, making Will’s heart ache, though he’s just as relieved as she is. He squeezes her arm, then says: “I also want to know what the plan is for when Hannibal Lecter finds out.”

Jack narrows his eyes. “We’ve decided it best to keep the knowledge of her survival away from him for as long as we can. He’s currently in a solitary cell, cut off from other inmates, and the staff will be informed beforehand that they will face legal prosecution if this is leaked to him.”

“What about the trial?” Abi whispers. “Won’t I have to testify?”

Will feels the color drain from his face. In all of this time, he hasn’t once thought about Hannibal’s trial and what that would mean for Abigail.

“Do you *want* to testify?” Jack questions her.

Her eyes widen and she shakes her head rapidly. “No. I can’t be in a room with him, h-he’ll come after me if I testify against him!” Her voice has risen in volume and her breathing is coming in short pants as the panic overtakes her.

“Shhh, Abi, it’s okay.” Will soothes her, rubbing calming circles on her arm. He’s admittedly a bit surprised at how scared she appears to be. Even in the weeks they’ve lived together, whenever Hannibal was brought up for one reason or another, Abigail had never once expressed the sort of fear she’s currently showcasing in front of Jack Crawford.

Will suddenly has to repress the urge to smack himself in the head because *of course*. Of course she's playing it up for not just their safety, but also because despite what Jack Crawford says, Will can tell by just the look in his eyes that he's still suspicious of what side of the law she's really on. His kid isn't stupid; of course Abi can see it too.

They'll have to talk about everything eventually. So far, he hasn't been willing to discuss the details of what happened in Florence, but every now and again Will catches her staring up at the still-healing scar on his forehead with something close to resentment in her eyes. On the other hand, sometimes a classical piece will play in a film or a cafe, and she suddenly stares off into space for a moment where he can feel the conflicted emotions running through her; longing, betrayal, missing and hating all at once. The first time it happened, Will tried to rationalize that he was simply projecting, despite all of the evidence to the contrary.

"You won't have to testify, Abigail." Jack is saying. "We have enough evidence against him, we don't need more testimony. And, as I said, we're planning to keep this from him for as long as we can, until things blow over."

In another show of docile fear, Abigail blinks away the tears in her eyes and sits back against the chair like all of the fight has left her body. It's a convincing lie, Will admits, and is even more proud when he sees even Jack's expression soften with sympathy.

"I understand that this is going to be a lot for the both of you once the word gets out. If you want to leave the state for a while, that's fine."

"That was already part of the plan, Jack." Will answers, squeezing Abi's arm again when her head whips around in surprise.

Jack nods. "Alright then. We're going to release the news this weekend, most likely Saturday, but I'll call you beforehand so that you're not blindsided when it happens. Is there anything else?"

Father and daughter share a look, then shake their heads simultaneously. With most everything worked out and the impending deadline of the end of their peaceful life, they exchange goodbyes, wait for the halls to be clear, and quickly leave the building.

Once in the safety of Will's car, Abi turns to him with a grin. "So, we're going on vacation?" She sounds nothing like she had before; all cheerful smiles and bright, excited voice. It makes him smile.

"I guess I should have said something first, but yeah, I think it would be best to go somewhere else. Or several places."

"Can we go to Louisiana?"

Will isn't sure what to be more shocked by; her enthusiasm, or her choice of state. "We can." He says slowly, unsure. "Why is that your first choice?"

Abigail shrugs. "I've never been there. I've always wanted to see New Orleans, and I know that's where you're from, so I just thought..." She trails off, suddenly embarrassed.

Will, however, can't stop his smile. He's actually quite touched by this, the idea that Abi wants to go to visit somewhere simply because it's his hometown. "If that's where you want to go, darlin', that's where we'll go." He allows some of his long-since-hidden drawl to coat his words because he knows she likes to hear it, and sure enough, her face lights up like fucking Christmas lights.

"Plus my French is pretty good now," She adds. "I was in AP French at school, and Hannibal helped me while I was... away."

Will should be disturbed by the comment, but he finds himself oddly amused. "Creole and French are pretty similar. You'll get on in New Orleans just fine. Anywhere else you wanna go?"

"Anywhere. I don't care." She sounds cheerful but there's a certain intensity that her words have that he notices immediately. "I just hope Jack Crawford actually keeps his word."

Will briefly clenches his jaw. "He will, if he wants us to cooperate." Then, as an afterthought, he adds: "I'm proud of you by the way. It even took me a minute to realize you weren't being entirely truthful with him."

The corner of her mouth lifts up into a smirk that looks so much like Hannibal's that Will feels his stomach flip. How the universe gave him a surrogate child that is a perfect mix of both surrogate parents, he'll never know, but he sort of loves it. "He's easy to lie to once you've figured him out." She replies matter-of-factly. "I'll lie to whoever I have to if it means we're okay. Except you. I'll never lie to you."

"And I'll never lie to you. We're in this together, okay?"

Abi nods in agreement, then flashes him that beaming, childlike smile that he's come to love so much, and promptly starts messing with the radio to 'play something other than 90s dad rock for once'. Will throws his head back with his laugh, and if she catches him mouthing the words to a Britney Spears song later, she doesn't mention it.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

TW: Violence, blood, y'know, Hannibal shit

Remontez les escaliers et verrouillez la porte, chérie. - (vaguely) Go back upstairs and lock the door, darling.

Will wakes up to the sound of the front door's lock being rattled. He lifts his head to scan the living room for Abigail, but his heart skips a beat when he realizes that she's nowhere to be found. The rattling starts up again, and Will realizes with horror that someone is trying to pick the lock.

He eyes his dogs, who have all woken up to the noise as well, and he makes a quiet noise through his teeth to signal them to be quiet. His instincts have gone into overdrive, and all he can think of is protecting his sleeping daughter upstairs. As silent as he can, Will slips out of bed and tiptoes towards the door just as the intruder gets the deadbolt unlocked and opens it as quietly as he can. Moonlight spills into the room, and a large figure steps over the threshold, into the darkness of Will Graham's farmhouse.

Will his hiding in the intruder's blind spot, knowing he will soon be spotted, but takes the time to size the man up. He's shorter than Will, if only by an inch or so, but what he lacks in height, he makes up for in bulk. The man is built like a linebacker, and a trickle of fear goes down Will's spine. He's quick and has surprisingly powerful stamina, but brute force from an assailant this stocky could be a problem.

He quickly pushes that thought away and holds his breath. He will protect his family. That much is certain.

Winston begins to growl at the intruder, making his head swivel around in the opposite direction, and Will takes his chance. He lunges at the man and slams into him with a loud growl emanating through the room. The man cries out as he's brought to the floor, but tries to twist around in Will's grasp.

"What are you doing here?" Will seethes in the man's ear. "Who the fuck are you?"

The man lets out a feral sound that Will can feel in his bones, then throws his body weight back, throwing Will off balance and sending him sprawling on his back. The assailant hauls himself off of the floor and grabs Will by the throat with both hands to lift him, and the moonlight hits his face just right so that Will can see his face. The man is no one he recognizes, with a thick face and a lumpy nose that signals it's been broken several times and

never reset properly. His eyes are as dark as his hair but bloodshot and wild like he hasn't slept in several days.

Will lets out choked little noises as he's dragged, but makes a quick decision to go limp to throw the man off, and feels a spark of pride when the man stumbles a little under the dead weight. Will kicks out and drives his foot into the man's stomach, and the hands disappear, dropping Will's body to the floor once again. The dogs are barking now, growling and barking at the intruder who is attacking their master, and Will signals to them to stay back, thanking every God he can think of that his pack is so well trained. He knows they're an advantage, but he needs to figure out who this motherfucker is before he turns all seven dogs on him.

Just as Will is getting to his feet, he sees a glint of silver in the light, and he realizes just a second too late that it's a knife. The man surges forward, his hand coming down in an arch as he does, and Will feels the red-hot slice of metal through the flesh on his upper arm. He stumbles back with a curse, but delivers a quick jab to the man's stomach and a second to the side of his face, then takes advantage of the man's faltered, uneven steps to launch himself on top of the assailant once more.

They grapple for the knife, rolling around on the floor as they do, and this time the man speaks. "They should have kept you locked up, you bastard. You and Lecter should burn together." The words are dripping with venom, and they strike Will across the face like a slap, but they tell him everything he needs to know. *Religious nut, wants us dead for our sins, angry at the justice system for keeping me out, decided to take matters into his own hands...*

Will punches the man in the face with as much force as he can muster, and the man chokes out a mouthful of blood as his nose breaks under Will's knuckles. The zest of bloodlust is pumping through his veins, bringing him to life while his prey squirms around helplessly on the floor. Will's lungs are burning from the chokehold, but the more air he takes in, the more eviscerating the power becomes. He'll take this man apart. He'll tear him to shreds with his bare fucking hands for thinking he can walk into Will Graham's home and threaten—

"Will?"

The bloodlust suddenly turns to dread at the sound of the creaking stairs and Abigail's frightened voice behind him. The intruder's head swivels around and his eyes widen when he spots her in the shadows, and Will steps to the side, blocking his view.

"Abi." He says calmly, though he's absolutely terrified. *"Remontez les escaliers et verrouillez la porte, chérie."* He hears her take a hesitant step backward, and the intruder's eyes follow her as she does, sending rage bubbling under his skin. *"Hey. Don't you fucking look at her, you look at me."*

The intruder's eyes flick back to Will and he sneers. "The Hobbs girl lived? She's as guilty as you are, Mr. Graham. You both need to die."

Something inside him snaps then and he takes a menacing step closer. "If you touch my kid, there will be no power in Heaven or on Earth that will protect you from me." Will snarls. The man seems to falter under the intensity for only a second before he coils for a pounce, and

through red tunnel vision, Will charges forward and slams into the man with all of his strength, sending them both sprawling to the floor. Memories of Randall Tier's bloody body breaking under Will's hands are swirling around his head, but this time, he doesn't imagine Hannibal Lecter, all he has to do is stare into the eyes of the man who threatened his daughter, and it's enough.

He delivers blow after blow to the man's face, relishing when his blood starts to trickle down to the floor. In the back of Will's mind, he can't help but think about how much he's missed this, the ability to take a monster down while falling victim to the darkness that's been so carefully tucked away.

The man makes a jerky motion with his right hand, and all of the thoughts evaporate when Will feels the cold steel blade slice through his torso. His body goes cold and he's vaguely aware of Abigail screaming for him in the background, even though it sounds like she's underwater.

"Abi, go!" He chokes out.

The man under him uses his new weakened state to kick Will off of him. Will falls onto his side without the stab wound and watches in horror as the man gets to his feet and starts to stalk forward towards Abigail, who is frozen and caged in by the wall with wide, terrified eyes that are fixed on the man coming towards her.

With all of the strength he can muster, Will pushes himself to his feet and sees the knife still embedded in his side. A crazy, stupid idea that just might work comes to mind, and without putting much thought into it at all, he grips the knife handle which is soaked in his blood, and pulls the blade from his own body, gritting his teeth as the white-hot pain overwhelms his senses. Not that it matters. His daughter is in danger, and that's all he needs to get moving.

The moment seems to happen in slow motion. Will pushes himself to his feet and runs as fast as his shaking legs will allow him to, just as the man is about to step into Abigail's space. He throws one arm around the man's neck and plunges the knife into his back with a growl, then twists the knife until he feels the spinal cord sever. He throws the man to the floor and towers above him with murder in his eyes as he positions himself in front of his daughter, shielding her from the vile thing on the floor.

"I severed your spinal cord." He informs the man who is choking on his own blood. "You aren't going to survive this, so you tell me now; does anyone know that you're here?"

The man does nothing but glare.

Will delivers a strong kick to his stomach, making the man cry out and vomit up a mouthful of blood. The sight is beautiful, he thinks as he crouches down to stare into the man's terrified face. "Fine. Don't tell me. It'll only be more painful for you."

The man's eyes get wide and he lets out a pathetic sounding whine.

Will smirks. "I'll give you one more chance. Am I going to have to kill anyone else? Does anyone know that you're here?"

He starts shaking his head vigorously, muttering apologies and pleas around the viscera in his throat.

Satisfied, Will reaches out, grips the man's face in his hands, and with a sickening twist and snap, he breaks the man's neck, killing him instantly. It's almost disappointing; he'd love to make this fucker suffer, but it's safer that it is over quickly.

As soon as it's over, he falls down against the wall and grips his wounded side with a groan. "Jesus *fuck*." He hisses.

"Will!" Abigail cries out, dropping to her knees beside him. There are tears on her face, and she's moving her hands around his body like she's afraid to touch him. "Oh my god, Will, I— What should I— God, there's so much *blood!*"

"It's okay, Abi," He tries to say, but it's cut off with another groan of pain. The adrenaline is falling now, and he can feel every injury on his body. Fuck he feels like he got hit by a train.

Abigail lets out a sob and reaches for him like she wants to stop the blood with her hands. "You're bleeding so much, I don't know what to do, I can't— I don't—" She's close to hyperventilating now, eyes watery and unfocused as she tries to help.

Will shushes her and pulls her to his chest where she collapses against him. The parallels to this night and the last time he was bleeding out in front of her are almost uncanny, and he can feel the desperation pouring off of her in waves. It breaks his heart to see his daughter like this, so distraught and terrified when all he wants is for her to feel safe with him.

"*Dad.*" She sobs into his shoulder, making his heart lurch painfully in his chest. "Please tell me what to do. *Please don't leave me alone.*"

"Shhhh, baby, it's okay." It's painful, but he wraps his arms impossibly tighter around her and brings one hand up to cradle her head. "It's not deep, it's a flesh wound. Just like *Monty Python*, yeah?" He presses a kiss to the top of her head. "I'm not dying, sweetheart, I'm alright. It's okay. Breathe for me." He pushes her back slightly, wincing as she tries to cling to him again, and he brushes the tears away with his thumb. "Deep breaths, okay? In and out. It's alright. You're safe. We're safe." He demonstrates the breathing and she mirrors him until the sobs have quieted into soft sniffles and she isn't shaking anymore. Her hands, arms, and the front of her t-shirt are covered in Will's blood, and it's then that he realizes the gravity of the situation they're both in.

Abigail seems to follow his train of thought and glances cautiously at the broken corpse. "What do we do?" She asks in a pleading tone.

As much as Will's anxiety is skyrocketing, he wills himself to calm down for Abigail's sake. He can have a panic attack in the shower. He shifts his body weight so that he can push himself to his feet. "There's a medical kit in the bathroom down here under the sink. Can you grab it?"

She nods then gets up and runs towards the bathroom.

Slowly and painfully, Will manages to stand up and make his way to the kitchen table just as Abigail is coming out with the kit. “Can I help? Hannibal showed me some first aid stuff.”

Will shakes his head. “I got it, darlin’.”

The saline is cold and the stitches hurt like a bitch. He goes briefly lightheaded when the needle pushes through his flesh for the first time, and only curses a few times while he patches himself up. Abigail is sitting in the chair next to him, watching him with wide eyes while he does this, until she suddenly gets up and he hears the clanking of glass in the kitchen. She returns with a glass of whiskey, and he cracks the first genuine smile of the night.

Once the bandages and gauze are wrapped around the wound, he throws back the entire glass in one gulp. It burns his throat, but immediately feels a bit of relief from the stab wound.

Will looks around the room and takes in the damage, but they’ve been almost impossibly lucky because the man’s blood is mostly contained to two spots: where Will beat the fuck out of him, and where he fell after getting stabbed and having his neck snapped. The dogs are whining and panting, and Will concocts his plan within seconds. “We need to move him. We’ll get him on something then get him to the barn. Then we come back in and clean the place so that there’s no evidence, then we’ll figure out where to go from there.”

Abigail, having calmed down significantly, nods and then takes off out the front door to grab a tarp.

It takes quite a while with Will’s injury, but thank fuck he still lives in the middle of nowhere, so there’s no one around to see the two of them clumsily dragging a rolled-up tarp into the barn in the wee hours of the morning. They let the dogs out into the yard while they scrub down every inch of the living room, and once it’s all over, it’s close to five in the morning. They’re both exhausted, but they congregate in the barn afterward and huddle around the corpse.

“What should we do with him?” Abigail asks him softly.

Will contemplates this, wishing for once that Hannibal was around so that he could borrow the murder basement. “I don’t want to bury him here. It’s too close to the property, especially since there’s probably going to be a hundred reporters on the lawn once word gets out you’re alive.”

She bites at her lip. “What about a lake? Gacy dumped people off of a bridge.”

“Unless you really weigh them down, bodies will float to the surface when it gets warm. It’s warm enough now that he’d come up really soon.” He gives her a smile. “It’s a good thought though.”

But Abi isn’t looking at him. She’s staring unfocused into the corner of the barn where many tools lie with an almost unreadable expression on her face.

Will frowns and reaches out to take her arm. “What is it, Abi?”

Abigail opens her mouth to speak, then promptly closes it again and it takes several long, agonizing seconds of silence before she tries again. “We could honor him.”

Will freezes and turns the words over in his head. *She can't really mean... Could she?* It's almost a horrific thought; cutting up this man and serving it at the dinner table like Hannibal or Garrett Jacob Hobbs. He couldn't. He can't.

Then again...

He glances down at the body at their feet and hates him. He hates this man for threatening his child, for compromising their sense of peace and security in their own home, and decides that this *thing* is nothing more than a pest that deserves to be swatted. He thinks about Hannibal, knowing that if he could see him now, that his face would light up with that Sphinx-like smile and he'd say something obnoxiously poetic about finding a man so bad that killing him felt so good, and the worst part? He'd be absolutely fucking right.

“That... is a possibility.” He finally replies, though he knows it's already been decided.

“We wouldn't be honoring him though, would we?” Abigail guesses. “He was a threat to us, so it isn't really murder either.”

Will cracks a smile. “You sound like Hannibal.”

“I'll take that as a compliment for the time being.”

Will turns and grabs a hatchet from the table behind him. He tests the weight in his hand, runs his fingers over the blade, then raises his head to look at his daughter. Abigail doesn't look frightened or even upset at what they're about to do, and surprisingly, Will isn't frightened either. This is protection for them. They cut him up, they eat what they can and dispose of what they can't another way, no one will ever know what happened.

It isn't murder. It's righteous. It's safety. Abigail will be safe if he does this, no one will take her away from him, and it'll be just a dirty little secret between them. They'll be able to continue their lives together.

The hatchet comes down with a powerful swing, and Will gives in to the electrifying sensation surging through his veins.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Hiya! This chapter seems like a lot of filler, but trust me the actual plot IS coming! I did have to introduce Molly and Walter because they will be part of this while Will gets hit shit together, but this is absolutely going to follow the season 3 part 2 arc in a fashion. I just wanted to explore Will and Abigail being the BAMF father-daughter duo they would have been before it gets wild.

Thank you to everyone who has been so kind to me for the last few chapters. I appreciate you all, and I hope everyone continues to enjoy this.
Canary

They use the meat for many things; sausage, soups, roasts, and whatever else they can think of to do. Abigail revealed to him that she still remembered some of the dishes that her father would make with the meat, as well as a few basic ones from Hannibal's infinite supply of recipes, so they add those to the mix as well. Will draws the line at feeding some of their kill to the dogs if only because the last time they were fed something that wasn't their usual, it was Mason Verger's raw face on the menu.

Nothing comes of the missing man (who they learned was Sean McCoy from Milwaukee Wisconsin from his ID); no television coverage, no missing posters, nothing. They've been almost horrifyingly lucky, and by the time Friday morning comes around and they're packed and ready for their nighttime flight to Louisiana, their spirits have lifted significantly.

Will drops the dogs off with the lady down the road who boards them occasionally, and when he comes back home around noon, Abigail ambushes him at the door with a hug. It's a tight embrace that he's grown accustomed to, but it sets off a few alarm bells in his head. She hugs him a lot, but this type of hug is generally reserved for when she needs comfort and safety.

"What's this about?" He chuckles as he wraps his arms around her. She doesn't respond outside of burying her face against his shoulder, and he frowns. "Abi, what's wrong? You okay?"

She finally pulls back and her eyes are shining, but he's temporarily dazzled by the beaming smile he finds instead of an anxious frown. "Yeah, I just... I'm *really* happy. I'm scared of what's going to happen tomorrow, but you're here, so... I'm okay."

Holy fucking God, does that hit him right in the heart. Will smiles back at her so hard that his cheeks hurt. "I'm happy you're here." He pulls her back against him and thanks his lucky stars for the second chance he's been given. Something else comes to mind in that moment,

something that they haven't discussed yet for whatever reason, and Will finally says: "You called me 'dad' the other night."

Abigail's body goes stiff when he says this, but she doesn't pull away. "Did it... bother you?" He hates how unsure she sounds.

"Why would that bother me?"

"I don't know." She sighs and steps out of his arms so that they can see each other's faces. "Do you um... do you remember when I said that just because you killed my dad didn't mean that you could become him?"

Will nods, remembering that conversation quite well, despite how much that rejection from Abigail hurt at the time.

Abi bites at her lip. "I hate that I said that to you. I was so attached to my dad, even knowing what he was and what he did. Hannibal tried to get me to understand what he did to me was really an act of love, and maybe it was from Hannibal's perspective. But... you were the only one who really loved me, all that time. I..." She breathes in and out shakily and wrings her hands. "I never knew what a father's love felt like until I met you. I want to keep it. I don't want to push you away anymore. I love you."

If he wasn't about to cry before, he certainly is now. The lump in his throat has gotten almost painful with how happy he is in this very moment. All along, he's been secretly thinking of Abigail as his daughter, and to find out that she thinks of him as a father is the best feeling in the world. *The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb*, he remembers hearing at some point. It doesn't matter that they aren't blood, they much more than that. They're connected, entwined, and stitched together like the pieces of a makeshift quilt. They found each other and forged a family all on their own.

Will doesn't need anything else in the world. Not now that he has this.

"Abigail," He murmurs in awe, and the answering smile he receives warms him to his very core. "You can keep it. I do love you, darlin', I love you *so* much. I think of you as my daughter already anyway."

Abi throws her arms around him again with a laugh. "I know you do, Dad, you're not very subtle."

Hearing her say it for the second time is almost better than the first time, and he hopes to God that she never stops calling him that.

Alana is the first to call him after the news breaks.

It's a relatively warm day but still too cold for a lot of the locals to enjoy Pensacola Beach, so they found a pretty quiet spot where they could lounge. Abigail is lying on her stomach a few feet from him with her nose buried in a copy of *Interview with the Vampire* that she picked up

the day before, but since Will picked up the call, he can tell she isn't as engrossed as she had been, even though Will got up to stand several feet away to talk.

Alana isn't exactly *angry*, but the loud exclamations from her end of the line were loud enough that Will had to pull the phone away from his ear to save his eardrums. She knows the story now at least, despite being a bit miffed at not finding out sooner. Will does feel a bit bad about not telling her, but at the same time, Alana hadn't exactly been supportive of his attachment to Abigail early on, not to mention the fact that Alana's broken pelvis was done by Abigail's hand. He had no way to know how Alana would take to Abigail's survival.

"But she's okay though, really?" Alana is asking for the third time.

Will sighs. "Yes, she's fine. Great actually. We're in New Orleans right now at the beach. Figured getting out of Wolf Trap for the time being was smart."

"You're definitely right about that." Alana agrees.

There's a moment of silence before Will says: "Alana..." just as Alana says "Look, Will," and they both laugh. "Go ahead." He tells her.

"I'm having a hard time wrapping my head around this." She says softly. "I can't imagine what she went through, but I can't lie and say that there isn't doubt in my mind about her."

Anger rises to the surface, but he quickly pushes it away. Alana has a reason to be upset, he has to tell himself. "Considering your last meeting, I understand why, but Alana, you have to believe that it was Hannibal pulling the strings."

She sighs. "I know that. God, do I ever know. She's just a kid, I know I can't blame her for trying to survive. I'm still just in shock."

"I know. I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I'm sorry you had to find out this way."

"Yeah, you're an asshole for that." She chides him without any real bite, which makes him laugh. "Look, Will, I'm happy for you. I really am. I... I know how much she means to you."

"I just want to leave everything behind. I want her to go to college if she wants to, and I want her to have a good life without serial killers and destruction. That's all I want."

"I know you'll do well. Abigail needs that sort of stability from someone who actually cares for her."

His eyebrows shoot up so fast he's sure they get lost in his hair. "Really? Last time we had a conversation like this you were convinced getting attached to her was a bad idea."

Alana laughs. "I forget how good your memory is. Yes, I said that. I believed it at the time, and I told Hannibal the same thing, but... God, Will, after everything she's been through, she needs a safe place. You're the safest person for her. Even I can understand that."

Will thinks back to the meals made out of Sean McCoy that have all been consumed by this point and smiles to himself because yes, Abigail is safest with him. “Thank you, Alana.” He says, and he genuinely means it.

“Of course, Will.” Then, as an afterthought, she adds: “Call me when you guys get back. Margot and I would love to have you two over for dinner.”

Images of the last time he sat down for dinner at the Verger home flash through his mind; Mason Verger’s fucked up weasel face mumbling on about eating Hannibal’s dick, the taste of blood in his mouth from biting a chunk out of Cordell’s face, and Hannibal’s proud grin and gleaming eyes from a few feet away. Something twists inside his belly at the memory, and while he tries to tell himself it’s trauma, he knows that it’s really because that was the last time he saw Hannibal smile. He swallows hard and tries to shake his head to clear the memories like an Etch-a-Sketch. “Sure. Why not?”

“Perfect. I’ve got to get going, but I’ll talk to you later, okay? Don’t be a stranger.”

Always the new boy at school. Always the stranger. “I won’t. Bye, Alana.”

“Take care, Will.”

He hangs up and rolls the tension from his shoulders before walking back toward their spot. Abigail is still pretending to read, and he feels himself smile. “Alana Bloom and her wife want to have us over for dinner when we get back home.” He says when he plops down on his towel again.

Abi’s head whips around to face him, and her jaw drops ever so slightly. It takes Will a minute to realize that this is the first time she’s ever heard about Margot Verger. The last time she was in Alana’s presence, Alana and Hannibal’s “relationship” had just met a literal bloody end.

After a moment of digesting, Abi says: “She... doesn’t hate me then?”

Will shakes his head. “She wants to extend an olive branch. It’ll be awkward as hell, but she’s happy that you’re alive. She wants you to be happy.”

“I am happy.”

“Are you?”

“Why wouldn’t I be? I survived and I got you back.”

Will smiles at her in response then leans forward so that he can kiss the top of her head. “And that’s enough for you?” He asks her.

“I mean, I could really go for some crawfish too, but...”

He throws his head back and laughs. “You had some last night!”

“And?”

“Guess we better find some then.”

On their last night in New Orleans, a little over three weeks since they arrived, the two shared dinner outside at a cozy pub where a blues busker was putting on a show. Will let her steal a sip of his Hurricane when no one was looking, much to her excitement, and she gave him her biggest shrimp as a thank you. Afterward, they had walked back to the hotel just as it started to rain, and neither of them made any point to hurry through the storm. It was a lovely night.

Will sits in the armchair of the hotel room with his head back, smiling to himself while he nurses a glass of whiskey and absentmindedly listens to the rain hitting the pavement outside and the music coming from the courtyard.

The bathroom door opens, releasing a cloud of steam into the room, and Abigail, dressed in a comfy hotel robe, steps out. Her eyes fall on him immediately, and she smiles tightly. “Hey.”

“Hey.” Will groans as he stretches and cracks several bones. “You alright?”

Abi nods unconvincingly and turns to grab her pajamas off of the bed.

Will frowns. “What’s bothering you, darlin’?” He tries.

“Nothing’s *bothering* me, really. I just...” She sighs. “This has been so awesome. This whole trip. I’m just a little sad that it’s over now.” She nervously bites at her lip. “I’m also... nervous, I guess, to go home.”

Will isn’t surprised. They’ve narrowly avoided being bombarded by the press throughout their stay, but he knows the moment they step foot back in Virginia, their little bubble of comfort will be broken. He isn’t thrilled either if he’s being honest. Perhaps it’s the alcohol, perhaps it’s the look on Abigail’s face, but Will makes a split-second decision. “Then we won’t go home.” He tells her simply.

Abigail flips around to face him with wide, surprised eyes. “But... the dogs?”

“I’ll text Alana and see if she and Margot could take them. They both love the dogs and they have a *lot* of room. I don’t think I could swing them for a whole second month, but a week or two for sure.” He gets out of his chair and goes to her, just so that he can wrap her in his arms. She tucks her head under his chin and squeezes him around his middle like a child, and Will’s heart breaks for her. “Where would you want to go? We can go anywhere you want.”

She laughs. “I picked New Orleans, Dad, isn’t it your turn?”

“Nah. This is all about you, darlin’.”

Abigail pulls away and gives him a pointed look. “You like giving me choices.” She observes.

Will shrugs. “You haven’t gotten a choice in a lot of things over the last few years.”

It's Abigail's turn to frown this time. "I'm not the only one who's had my choices taken from them. I don't want you to do things just because *I* might want them."

"That's not what I'm doing at all. I do these things because it makes me happy to see *you* happy." He explains sternly, but not unkindly, complete with a comforting smile.

Her own answering smile is teasing. "We're totally codependent, aren't we?"

"Totally."

Their laughter echoes off the walls, and together they sit and plan their next adventure.

They settle on Massachusetts for the second half of their getaway after Alana rather enthusiastically agrees to take their dogs. Abigail had loved Louisiana, but she suggested going somewhere further East by the coast, and Will had been more than happy to indulge her. He had traveled to Boston several times, and he had quickly drafted a list of things to take Abigail to. She had talked his ear off the entire morning while a halo of giddiness hovered over her, and he could feel her happiness so intensely that he didn't mind at all.

"I visited Boston once in eighth grade for a field trip. The buildings are *beautiful*, Dad, the old trees, the brick, the ivy, *ugh*."

"Oh! Can we go to Salem? It's kinda weird having the same name as a girl accused of witchcraft, but like, the city looks so cool and I'd love to see the Witch House."

"Do you think the Irish pubs out there would let me in? Like, if you were with me? I'm eighteen, I can be there with an adult past ten, don't you think?"

"I want to see Harvard too. I went as Elle Woods from *Legally Blonde* when I was a sophomore. My mom wouldn't let me bleach my hair so I had this wig and it was so itchy that I took it off like ten minutes into the costume party. Everyone thought I was Fran Fine from *The Nanny* after that."

"I'm not the biggest fan of clam chowder, but I've only had like Campbell's Chunky to base my opinions on. I'll have to try it when we're there."

Will let her go on, because of course he had. The first few weeks they had spent together after being reunited, Abigail had been rather quiet and stoic, as she always had in the past. Now she talks all of the time about all manner of things, never afraid to tell him what's on her mind, and he hangs onto her every word. She's bright and happy and thriving, even when she makes a gallows humor comment that would alarm anybody else.

He glances over at his daughter in the seat beside him with a smile. It's a relatively warm afternoon as well as the first huge Boston Red Sox of the season where they're playing the New York Yankees. It's a massive and overcrowded event, but Will is fond of baseball, so Abigail suggested it, despite caring very little for the sport herself. She does seem particularly excited for her stadium hot dog, if the mustard on the tip of her nose is anything to go by.

“Is mustard a new type of concealer?” He teases her, tapping his own nose as a hint.

“Shut *up*.” She groans, wiping the condiment/concealer off with a napkin.

He can’t help but laugh at how annoyed she sounds. “You bored yet?”

“No, I’m fine! I don’t understand what’s happening, but it seems to be going well.”

“All you need to know is that the Yankees are losing.” Will replies, making her laugh.

“Amen to that.” Says the woman beside him.

She’s a pretty woman with a kind smile and blonde hair that’s tied up in a bun. She has a young boy with her on her other side, and up until that point they hadn’t spoken to one another at all, but her comment is funny and Will is in a good mood, so he chuckles and flashes her his smile.

“Last week Wally here,” She continues, placing a hand on the boy’s head. “Asked me what he should be when he grows up, and I told him ‘honey, you can be whatever you want to be, except a Yankees fan.’”

“That’s good life advice.” Will replies easily. “Start ‘em early.”

“You gave her the same advice?” The woman asks, nodding over at Abigail.

An onslaught of memories come to him, of the early days where all they spoke about was ghosts and blood, to his calm authoritative voice telling Abigail where to cut into Sean McCoy’s body, and he has to push them away. His smile falls into a grimace for a moment, but she doesn’t seem to notice. “Yeah, something like that.”

The woman beams at him, a pretty pink blush dusting her cheeks. “Sorry for butting in, I love meeting other Yankees-haters. I’m Molly, by the way.”

“Will.”

They chat throughout the remaining five innings, and occasionally Abigail joins in, but mostly it’s just Molly and himself. He learns that her late husband played for the Portland Sea Dogs, the minor league team for the Red Sox, before he got sick with cancer and had to end his career before his shot at the majors. He learns about the lovely cabin house in Maine and their three dogs, and Molly learns about their own pack. When the game ends with the Red Sox winning 4 to 2, she actually throws her arms around him and he lets her, then accepts her phone number on the way out.

“Molly’s nice.” Abigail says as they’re in the car on their way back to the hotel.

Will hums, staring out the windshield ahead at the grey-blue Boston sky, and thinks back to Molly’s sweet smile. “Yeah, she was.”

She nudges him with her elbow. “Dad, if you want to see her again, you should.” She encourages.

He looks over at her in confusion, but an amused smile is pulling at his lips. “Are you giving me permission to date?”

“Yeah, you’re old enough now.” She teases, making him laugh.

“I appreciate your encouragement, but I highly doubt that would work out.”

“You don’t know if you don’t try.”

“What’s this sudden interest in my dating life? Or lack-there-of, I guess.” He asks, not unkindly. Really, he’s just curious.

Abigail shrugs. “I just want you to know that you can have other things in your life besides me. Other people, I mean. You’re giving me a good life, Dad, and I want you to have one too.”

For a second, he remains silent. This whole thing is very sudden and it’s certainly giving him whiplash. Will isn’t *lonely* really, not anymore, not now that he has his daughter, but Molly’s phone number on the napkin in his pocket is burning, and he for a moment he indulges the fantasy of a partner like Molly. A nice, rustic woman with a bleeding heart with a son and a pack of her own, a house in the wilderness where everything is quiet and peaceful. It sounds ridiculous compared to the life he wanted not too long ago; one with Hannibal at his side, running from Jack in another country, but always together.

Because if Will has realized anything about himself in the last few months, it’s that his feelings for Hannibal Lecter still outweigh the tragedies, especially now that he has Abigail with him. He feels anger toward Hannibal for trying to take Abigail from him, but he also understands too much, which is why he still feels guilt all this time later, knowing that Hannibal is caged and he is free. Their relationship (or *courtship*) as Alana had put it, had been gruesome, unforgiving, and full of deceit and broken promises, but how easy is it to deny yourself the temptation of the monster when all you want to do is curl yourself around his wings and allow him to drag you under?

Will sighs heavily to himself, realizing how angry he is by this whole crisis. Hannibal is gone. He’s behind bars where he should be. Will sent him away and he chose to be caged to entertain some notion that Will would finally give in and come find him.

But that isn’t an option now. He’s a father now, and he needs to give his daughter a normal, healthy life.

And, if he’s honest with himself, he likes Molly. She’s bright, fun, down to Earth... completely normal. A normal woman with a normal son. Will could use a little normal.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, sorry it's a little late, I've been going through hell back home and haven't had time to write. Anyway, this is the final filler chapter before we move on to part 2 of this story, but I wanted to explore a bit of Will's inability to let Hannibal go because this is going to be a huge part of this story as it was in canon. So, I hope you enjoy this, thank you to everyone who has read this so far.

Love,
Canary

It's early September, and it's beautiful in Maine. Will always enjoyed fall, having not seen much of the changing leaves until he was almost a teenager because of his father's work, so to be in the crisp air in the middle of the forest always bring him joy.

He isn't alone this morning; the dogs, all ten of them, are milling about, playing in the leaves and underbrush of the woods, and to his left, Abigail is walking beside him with a content little smile on her face. She's carrying a backpack and her sketchbook under her arm, which she's rarely seen without these days, but she doesn't usually take it with them when they take the dogs for walks. She's been acting strange all morning, leaning into him like she hasn't done since before they left Virginia, and the unusual behavior is a little concerning, but he knows Abi will talk when she's ready. He knows he's a little nervous too.

He's getting married tomorrow.

Tomorrow morning at ten-thirty he will stand before a judge and marry Molly Foster. It's not going to be a huge affair, they both wanted it simple and lowkey, but it's happening. Abigail and Wally will be with them, as well as Molly's sister, Kate, and her husband who Will keeps forgetting the name of.

He's happy though. He loves Molly, and he's excited to spend his life with her, especially since she knows all about him.

It had been a very long conversation, but now, Molly knows the (very edited) events that brought Abigail and himself together. She knows about Hannibal, his stint in the BSHCI, and she still looks at him like he's the best thing in the world. She and Abigail got along great too, which had been a huge relief. Sure there wasn't much for Molly to do, considering Abi is an adult, but Abigail enjoys having a mother figure around again. Walter is a shy boy who gets along with everyone he meets, so it had been easy for Will to get along with him. Walter and Abi love each other and have even begun to bicker as siblings do. It's not a bad life. Not even a little bit.

His own bond with Abigail is the only thing to not change. They are still closer to each other than they are with anyone else, Abi still gravitates towards him whenever he's around, as he does with her. Abi tells him things she tells no one else, as he does with her. They're probably closer than any father-daughter pair around, and even Abigail admits she's closer to Will now than she was to her actual father.

"You know this doesn't change anything, right?" He remembers telling her the night he proposed to Molly. *"There is nothing more important to me than you."*

Abigail had beamed at him and wrapped her arms around his torso in a tight hug. *"I know that. It's you and me, Dad."*

"Just you and me."

Abigail looks up at him with narrowed eyes. "What?"

Will realizes he said that out loud and he clears his throat. "Sorry, I was..."

"Fishing?" She jokes.

"Something like that."

They stop at the river nearby and sit on the bank while the dogs run around, just to watch the fish in the current. It's quiet. Peaceful. Lovely.

"Dad?" Abigail breaks the silence sounding apprehensive, and he turns to her in concern. She catches his eye and bites at her lower lip, worrying the skin between her teeth. He can feel her anxiety, but also excitement underneath it all, and he doesn't quite know what to make of it. "I've been thinking..."

When she trails off again, Will shifts and angles his body so that he's able to look at her fully. "What's up, darlin'? You alright?" He asks, brushing a strand of hair out of her face.

She nods slowly, still looking off into the distance. "I want to change my last name."

Will startles at that, because out of everything he expected her to say, that was certainly not one of them. "Change your name?"

"Just my last name." She corrects him. She draws her knees up to her chest while she talks, and leans back against the tree. "I don't want to be Abigail Hobbs anymore. Having his last name makes me feel like he's still got a hold on me, and he won't let me go. It... it's like a brand, Dad."

Will feels himself sinking into her words as he's reminded of Hannibal once again. The scar on his stomach twinges with pain for the first time in a long while, and he wonders if the brand on Hannibal's back from the Vergers ever burns too. "Garrett Jacob Hobbs loved you the only way he knew how."

"He did." She agrees. "But, I survived him. And if he could see me now, he'd want me dead all over again just for staying with you. I'm sick of feeling like that."

He can't deny that she's speaking the truth. Hobbs couldn't let his daughter go, so he tried to kill her. If Hobbs saw Abigail, *his* Abigail, embracing the man who pumped him full of bullets, if he heard her call Will Graham "Dad", he would probably lay as much devastation upon them as he could. Much like Hannibal did.

Will swallows down another painful memory, and it burns all the way down. "You want to rid yourself of him so that you can breathe."

"He still suffocates me." Abigail's voice wavers and that fierce protectiveness wells up inside him.

Will takes both of her hands and squeezes them. "Whatever you need, Abi. We'll do it."

"Can I take yours?"

He knew it was coming, but that doesn't stop the overwhelming joy that he feels in every cell. He tries to keep his voice level when he says: "If that's what you want."

Abigail beams at him through tear-filled eyes and nods ecstatically. "It is. *You're* my Dad now, not him. You already technically adopted me, but I... I want this too. Since, y'know, Molly's going to be a Graham now too, and Wally's hyphenating, I want to be part of that." She uncurls from her position and opens up her sketchbook to remove a small stack of papers. Will catches the *PETITION FOR OFFICIAL NAME CHANGE* printed at the very top, and his heart does a flip.

He lets out a breathless laugh. "You already picked up the paperwork." He says in awe.

"Shut up." She grumbles, her face turning pink. "I uh... I was going to surprise you, but it's very hard to do that when you literally know *everything*."

Will laughs. "Luckily you're a good kid who doesn't keep secrets."

"Oh, I keep secrets, just not from you." She retorts.

Will reaches out and takes the documents from her hands. He scans his eyes over the page, his heart soaring when he sees *Abigail Elizabeth Graham* printed out in her delicate script. His vision is blurring the more he looks at it. "This is what you want? Really?"

Abigail leans into him and he wraps his arm around her. "Yes."

Will can't help the smile that stretches across his face.

So they sit there for a while and watch the river. The dogs settle around them, and father and daughter soak up the rays of the sun from behind the trees, and eventually, he closes his eyes.

He opens them again sometime later and rubs the feeling of sleep from his skin, but catches movement out of the corner of his eye and glances to the right where he sees the Ravenstag approaching them through the trees. This time, the animal has a companion, a young doe with fur and feathers of the same ink-like color. The doe is nestled into the stag's flank, and Will looks down to see Abigail in a very similar position, dozing peacefully against his shoulder.

It's the first time he's seen his Ravenstag in so long, he had almost forgotten its existence.

Behind the trees, there is another shadow that moves behind the stag and its fawn, and Will feels something twist within him when he sees Hannibal step out from amongst the trees.

God, he looks just as Will remembers from their days of friendship; bespoke midnight blue three-piece suit and Florentine leather shoes, hair slicked back in that pristine, handsome way he always had it. Will's heart is racing, and almost instinctively, he wraps his arms protectively around Abigail.

"What do you want?" He rasps.

Hannibal smiles, and it reminds Will of serpents, destruction, and *home*. He doesn't say anything, just stands and watches Will and their surrogate daughter, sending a burst of electricity down Will's spine and the feeling of violence to his blood.

"You won't take her from me." The trees buzz around him with the ravenous power behind his voice.

Hannibal drops his eyes to the floor, tilting his head to the side thoughtfully. "It would be cruel to separate you now."

"Like you know nothing of cruelty, Dr. Lecter." Will snarls.

"I know as much about cruelty as you do." Hannibal replies calmly, but Will can feel the undercurrent of resentment coursing through him. "Do you believe this will fulfill you? A wife, a family, a normal, average life?"

Will grits his teeth. "I'm not like you."

"Indeed you are not. You are so beautifully unique, Will. What father wouldn't butcher and dine on the intruder who threatened his child?"

It feels like a slap in the face, and Will feels so angry that he has to stop himself from reaching for the shotgun at his side. He doesn't entertain the thought, because he knows it will lead to a spiral and he can't afford that right now.

Hannibal takes a step forward, crunching leaves under his shoes as he does, and Will's eyes shoot to him once again. "You can immerse yourself in this life, deny your true self, all of your dark impulses, play house with your garden-variety wife, and pretend that there is nothing wild inside of you." He smirks and it sends a chill down Will's spine. "But can you do the same for her?"

Will's blood goes icy cold as he looks down at the sleeping teenager in his arms.

"She is a part of you, just as I am, and Abigail is a part of me, just as I am of her. You said yourself that we are conjoined. Our lines have blurred, and Abigail is the color that is smudged in between."

“Abigail is her own person.” Will argues. “She’s chosen her path, as have I, and it doesn’t lead to you.”

He expects Hannibal to be angry, but instead, he just smiles, then reaches out to touch Will’s cheek. It’s just a small brush of the fingers against his jaw, but it sends his breath catching in his throat.

The feeling of his hands shouldn’t feel so good. It shouldn’t warm his body and make him want to reach out and touch Hannibal back. It shouldn’t feel better than any time Molly touches him, but it *does*.

“Will.” Hannibal murmurs, and Will squeezes his eyes shut. He doesn’t want to look.

A loud, shrill noise startles him and his eyes snap open just as Abigail’s do, and they both sit upright. Will gasps and looks around for Hannibal, but is both relieved and devastated to realize that the apparition had only been a dream.

“Dad?” Abigail nudges him. “Your phone is ringing.”

He blinks, realizing that she’s right, and slips the phone out of his pocket to see Molly’s name on the caller ID. He feels a surge of guilt, but answers anyway. “Hey.”

“Hey, hotshot.” Molly’s cheerful, affectionate voice rings through his head, and Will smiles, pushing all thoughts of Hannibal Lecter away.

Eight Months Later

Will fucking hates hospitals. He hates the smell, he hates all of the emotions flying around, happy, angry, sad, heartbroken, terrified, anything and everything. He hates being here. He hates where he is.

The heart monitor is beeping next to him, steady and even, and there’s a steady hiss of oxygen from nearby, but it doesn’t do anything to calm him down. He feels sick and terrified, not to mention exhausted. It’s day three of no sleep, and even with his unusual ability to nap anywhere, he doesn’t want to think about closing his eyes now.

Slowly, he lifts his head and stares blearily at Abigail’s pale, still form curled up in the hospital bed, buried beneath her favorite blanket from home and Will’s flannel that he placed over her this morning.

He feels tears of exhaustion and desperation welling up in his throat, and he tries to keep them down, but he can’t take his eyes off of her, and it hurts to look.

They thought it was just the flu at first, but then her fever wouldn’t go down and she couldn’t keep anything in her stomach, not even water, so their only solution was the hospital. They’ve been fighting her fever, but it’s continued to spike, never fully dropping below 100

degrees. Abi hasn't been completely conscious in three days, and her brief moments of consciousness were mostly just fever dreams. Or, in Abigail's case, horrific nightmares.

Will still feels sick to his stomach when he remembers how she gripped his shirt, looked deep into his eyes, and pleaded with him to run.

"Run from what, Abigail?" He whispered back. His voice trembled as he felt her terror clouding all rationality out of his mind.

"My Dad is behind you! He's going to kill you!" The hushed, croaking sobs still feel like stones in his heart. *"You took me from him, h-he wants you dead!"*

She had buried her face in his throat and cried out pleas for several minutes until she slipped back into unconsciousness.

That had been Will's fucking breaking point.

Twenty minutes later, Molly was driving them to the emergency room while Will sat sprawled on the backseat with Abigail in his arms, two fingers on her pulse point in her wrist, and his face buried in her dirty, oily hair.

Will feels powerless. Useless. Unworthy.

Molly has tried to make him leave, even just for a few hours, but he refuses to. Nothing could make him leave this room.

Will groans and runs his shaking hands down his face and lets his head hit the mattress. There's a horrible, terrifying, sick feeling swirling around in his gut as he looks at Abigail. Her cheeks look hallow, her eyes look sunken in, she's deathly pale and so fragile and it's ripping him up to know he can't do anything to help her.

His phone chimes in his pocket, and he quickly reads the message from Alana, sending her love to Abigail and wishing her a speedy recovery. It just makes him angry.

He's alone in the room, except for his barely conscious child. Molly, seeing how upset he was, decided it best to go home with Wally after the second day, and Will remained behind. He's surprisingly grateful that the rest of the family isn't here, because Will doesn't think he could stand to have anyone else but the doctors and himself near Abigail right now. He almost snapped at a nurse for handling the IV too roughly and had to breathe a few times before he could relax.

He feels like he's going out of his mind.

He's suffocating in the helplessness.

And most horrifically, all he wants to do is talk to Hannibal.

It wouldn't do anything. It would do nothing but lead him down a path of destruction, it wouldn't help Abigail, but he wants to feel reassured. He wants the clarity that only Hannibal

can give him. He wants to hear his voice and listen to his verbal spars, he wants to hear Hannibal tell him that their... that *his* daughter is okay, and that she'll wake up.

God, what's wrong with him? He hasn't even been married a year and he's already back to pining for Hannibal fucking Lecter?

"You don't need him." He tells himself, hoping that saying it out loud will convince him.

The night nurse comes in and takes Abigail's temperature a few minutes later, and frowns when she tells him it's still almost 102. No change.

Will nods through her talking, though her voice sounds muffled against the screaming in his ears. He doesn't know how much longer he can do this.

He blinks back tears and watches his daughter sleep, afraid to look away for even a second.

"I felt helpless the first time Wally got sick. It's normal. You're her father, honey, of course, you feel like this." Molly had been trying to help. She really had.

It wasn't helpful.

Will has already had to go through losing Abigail twice. Two separate losses, both accompanied by rage and grief. It doesn't matter that she's still here, because he's still had to feel go through the motions. It's worse now because it isn't Hannibal Lecter pulling the strings, it's one thing that Will can't control; illness. A virus that's mauling his daughter's immune system while Will just sits here.

Hannibal would know what to do. He'd know what to say. He'd know how to fix this. He'd know how to make her better.

It wouldn't be difficult. He'd call the hospital, and ask to be put through to Hannibal's cell. It's the middle of the night in Baltimore, but all he'd have to say is *"my name is Will Graham and I need to speak to Hannibal Lecter"*, and they would make it happen. The nurse would bring him the phone and wake him from his sleep, if he was sleeping at all.

"It's Mr. Graham for you, Doctor." The nurse would say.

And Hannibal would smile and thank them, then wait until they left to pick up the phone. Would his heart be racing? Would he be excited? Smug? Would he start out with a metaphor, or would he simply say hello?

And how long would it take for Will to crumble?

Will gazes down at the phone in his hands, and against every voice telling him no, he shakily scrolls through his contact list to the private, secure line that gets him to the admin desk. His heart is pounding relentlessly against his ribs, his hands are shaking, and there's a bead of sweat rolling down the back of his neck.

He looks up at Abigail once more, and his stomach drops. He feels shattered. He feels hollow.

Hannibal would know what to do.

He presses the Call button and lifts the phone to his ear, heart pounding. It rings once, then twice, then—

The sliding door to the hospital room hisses open, and Will quickly ends the call and whips around, startled. Molly blinks at him in shock. “Are you okay?”

Will blinks several times to clear the fog from his eyes and sags down into his chair. “Hey. Yeah.”

She smiles warmly at him and closes the door behind her. She’s dressed in pajamas and she’s holding a duffle bag, and it sends a twisted feeling of guilt through his body. How could he sit there and obsess over Hannibal when his *wife*, the woman he *married*, obviously just drove to the hospital to bring him a change of clothes at three in the morning? God, he’s so fucked.

“Who were you calling?” She asks casually.

“You, actually.” He lies, and it comes out easily. “The nurse took her temperature again. It’s still 101.”

Molly makes a regretful noise, then approaches the bed and tucks the blanket tighter around Abigail’s body. He feels her concern, her affection for the sick teenager in front of her, and he allows the feeling to wash over him. Molly is good. Molly is a mother, she knows what to do.

Once she’s done she joins Will in the chair beside his and places a comforting hand on his knee. “She’ll be alright, honey.”

He nods, suddenly too exhausted to do anything else. He wants to sleep, but he’s still afraid to, just in case something happens. He leans his head on Molly’s shoulder. “I don’t know what to do.” He says without really meaning to.

“Just let the doctors do what they need to do.” Molly says, and he feels ashamed to lie to her again, but he can’t very well tell Molly what he really means. Just like he can’t tell her about the phone call he almost made. “And, let me be here for you, Will. You aren’t alone here, honey, it’s okay to lean on me if you need it.”

Will sighs heavily and feels the fight leaving his body. He turns and pulls her in for a quick kiss and allows himself to be comforted by his wife. He pushes all thoughts of Hannibal away and focuses on what he has now.

He doesn’t need Hannibal.

He doesn’t.

A few minutes go by, and Will starts to feel restless, so he gets up and stretches. He fights back a grimace as *way* too many cracks and pops echo in the quiet room, and Molly pats his hip and says “you got this, Grandpa”.

Abigail is still very pale, but her breath no longer sounds like it's rattling her chest, and when he brushes her hair back from her forehead, she doesn't feel quite as warm as earlier, but still too hot for his liking. He feels her pulse on her wrist beneath his fingers regardless of the heart monitor, just to prove to himself she's alive. Satisfied, he leans down and presses a kiss to her forehead, then whispers an *I love you* into her hair.

Just as he pulls away, her bright blue eyes slowly open, and his heart leaps into his throat. She's cloudy but more aware than she's been in days. A wounded sound escapes his throat and he rushes back to her side. "*Abi?*" He whispers.

She closes her eyes again and smiles gently. "You look like shit." Her voice is dry and weak, but she's coherent enough to make fun of him, and he loves her so fucking much.

He throws back his head with a laugh, and somewhere behind him, Molly is calling his name, but he can't do anything else but throw his arms around his child and hide the tears on his face in her hair. "You sound like shit." He murmurs back as lovingly as he can.

Abigail laughs weakly against his throat, and he holds her tighter, thanking every deity he can think of.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Buaregh my loves!

Filler chapters are done, now we're getting to the plot-plot. We're going to follow the Red Dragon arc with Abigail in tow. There will be some alternating POVs between Abigail and Will, but trust me, Hannibal is coming and it's going to be so fucking fun to write. I'm very excited.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this, please tell me what you think!

Love,

Canary

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Three Years Later

There isn't much that frightens Abigail Graham anymore. She is much more resilient at twenty-two than she was at eighteen, but the sight of the large, official-looking SUV in her family's driveway is enough to chill her blood with its implication. The lights in the house are on and both Molly's truck and her father's Subaru are present, but this does nothing to ease her worries.

With a sick feeling in her gut, she knows who has made a house call.

She parks and throws the strap of her duffle bag over her shoulder. The air is frigid on her barely covered body, but she had been too hot after ballet to put on sweats, so she runs from her car to the front door and fumbles with the lock.

"Dad?" She calls out immediately. There's a frantic edge to her voice that she can't quite hide.

"In the kitchen, darlin'!" Will shouts back. His voice is light, obviously relieved at having her home, but she knows her Dad. She knows what he sounds like when he's stressed or unhappy, and she hears it now. Her heart beats impossibly faster.

Abigail drops her dance bag on the floor and makes her way into the kitchen. Her eyes seek Will out immediately, and she finds him leaning up against the counter with a glass of whiskey in his hands. Molly and Walter are busying themselves with preparing the fish for dinner, and they both say hello when she walks in. Jack Crawford is the last one she sees.

Her blood turns to ice when she sees him in their living room, and when Crawford looks up and their eyes meet, she has the childish urge to run and hide.

Not much scares her anymore, but Jack Crawford certainly does. She's well aware of the lengths he is willing to go to reach his goals once he has his heart set on something. Jack Crawford's agenda has always included Will Graham too. Seeing him here in her kitchen where she and her father have been able to be safe and hide away is shaking her to her fucking core.

Jack looks older, a few more wrinkles added to his permanently stressed-out expression, and he looks at her like he's shocked to see her. It's an odd expression that agitates her; she feels like he looks at her and doesn't think she belongs, even though he was the one that brought them together again. He nods at her slowly. "Hello, Miss. Hobbs." He speaks steadily, but a chill goes up her spine nonetheless.

"It's Graham, actually." Abigail responds, not unkindly. She swallows hard and forces a friendly smile. "Hello, Agent Crawford."

"Abi. *Viens ici, ça va.*" Will murmurs lowly, reaching out his arm for her.

Feeling relieved, she goes to him immediately and lets him pull her into a hug. She knows Jack is watching her still, feels his eyes burning into her back, but she holds Will tightly and lets the feelings of security wash over her. It doesn't matter that she's in her early twenties now, Abigail will always run into her Dad's arms when she needs to feel comforted, and Will's need to keep her close means he's more than willing to let her.

"*Que fait Jack ici?*" Her voice is so quiet that no one else would be able to hear it or even notice that she spoke.

Will in turn says nothing, and her heart drops to her stomach because she doesn't need him to say it. She knows very well why Jack Crawford is here. She clings to him for a second longer, then pulls away and smooths out her features. *Play pretend, put on the mask, but when it's just us, you never have to pretend.* Will had told her long ago when she was worried about fitting into a normal life again, mirroring what Hannibal said to her after she killed Nick Boyle. *And, when you are with me, you don't have to lie about anything.*

It'll be okay. Her Dad will handle it, just like he always does. Once Jack Crawford leaves, they'll be able to talk, but for now, she has to observe and play a regular twenty-something with a regular family.

"Catch anything good?" She asks as she steps out of her father's arms and ruffles Walter's hair.

He makes an annoyed sound and tries to swat her hand away. "Quit it!" He hisses.

Abigail sticks her tongue out at him, which he returns with gusto.

"Wally, be nicer to your sister." Molly chides. She turns and flashes Abi a smile. "How was class today, Abigail?"

"It was fine. I finally nailed the grand jeté in that combo I've been struggling with." She says casually and feels Will smiling proudly at her from the side.

“Ooh, good job, honey!” Molly exclaims.

Abigail lifts her foot and prods her brother’s leg. “Hey, that kid in your class you hate, what’s his name? The one who’s really full of himself.”

“Colin.”

“Yeah, him. His sister Andrea is in my ballet class. It’s totally hereditary; she’s just as bad.”

Wally scrunches up his nose in disgust. “Gross.”

“I know, right? She’s *awful* though, like, she can’t dance to save her life, so I don’t know why she thinks she’s hot shit.”

“Language.” Will chides her and she rolls her eyes dramatically.

Jack Crawford, who had been watching this exchange perhaps a bit too closely for her liking, suddenly speaks up. “You take ballet lessons, Abigail?” He asks.

She nods, keeping her expression lighthearted despite how uneasy she is in his presence. “I did ballet until my sophomore year. Now I just have more time to do it.” She explains.

“She does kickboxing too!” Wally nearly shouts with glee, and she has to conceal her wince.

Jack raises his eyebrows. “Wow.”

“Yeah, I’m not very good at it.” She admits sheepishly. “I wanted to try it anyway.”

It’s not a lie; not entirely at least. It’s another one of the partial truths that she has to keep to herself, with the exception of Will of course. Abigail has always been... small. She’s technically above average in her height, but she’s been petite since she was a child, making her look vulnerable. She has no issues with being vulnerable, but she’s also been through enough to know that some people will exploit any weakness they can find.

Mentally, Abigail Graham has become strong, but her mind does her no good if she can’t protect herself physically. However, it isn’t just about self-defense from everyday, garden-variety creeps on the streets. No, not at all. Abigail trains her body in case she ever needs to defend herself or Will against a killer. She still feels regret when she sees the small scar under her father’s ribs from where Sean McCoy stabbed him. She was so scared that she froze instead of listening to Will, and she never wants them to be in that situation again.

And of course, if Hannibal Lecter ever decides to come after them, she wants to be ready if it goes badly.

“Well, it gives your Dad and me some peace of mind knowing that you have self-defense training,” Molly interjects. “Once you get to UMaine, you’ll be able to keep those handsy frat boys off of you.”

She can actually hear Will’s jaw lock when Molly mentions frat boys and she almost rolls her eyes. Will is different from Garrett in many ways, all except for one: they don’t enjoy the idea

of Abigail and *boys*. “Trust me, frat boys are the last thing on my mind.”

“You’re going to UMaine?” Jack notes.

She nods. “Yeah, in the spring.”

“What are you studying?”

“Major in Psychology, minor in Dance.”

Jack actually looks impressed and it makes her instantly annoyed. She’s dealt with Crawford enough to know that he’s always fishing for something abnormal as part of his job, but Abigail isn’t stupid. She knows that he has never quite lifted suspicions off of her, which is admittedly fair, but Crawford is undoubtedly a threat.

Abigail turns away from him and busies herself by getting a glass of orange juice. “So, what brought you this far north, Agent Crawford?” She asks lightheartedly and feels the energy shift when her father suddenly goes very still beside her.

Jack shuffles his feet awkwardly on the floor behind her. “Work, unfortunately.” He responds, giving her all of the information she needs.

Abigail’s stomach drops immediately. She isn’t surprised, but the knowledge chills her blood right to her core. Fear has gripped her insides and twisted them all up. She doesn’t know whether to feel sick or to feel angry, all she wants is for Jack Crawford to walk out of their house and never come back. Abigail knows what Jack Crawford wants though, and he doesn’t care what he has to pull to get it.

Don’t take him. Don’t take him away. She thinks desperately.

“Well, if you have time, you should go to Acadia National Park. It’s beautiful there.” She says instead, her voice staying level and enthusiastic, giving nothing away. She’s actually impressed with how casual and lighthearted she sounds. Her acting has gotten much better in the last few years.

“Oh, I know, I’ve seen pictures.” Jack responds with a hearty chuckle.

Abigail imagines driving a knife into his windpipe and has to shake the image out of her mind.

Obviously feeling her tension, Will reaches out and rubs her back between her shoulder blades. “Dinner will be ready in a few minutes. Why don’t you go change?” His voice is calm and soothing, but she can hear his apprehension, and it does nothing to squash the anxiety attack she’s well on her way to having.

She nods, decidedly not looking at him. “Yeah, I’ll be right back.” She mutters, then, as an afterthought, she slaps her brother’s arm on the way past him. “Don’t steal all of the potatoes again or I’ll hide your 3DS.” She warns him, the edge in her voice easily mistakable for sibling rivalry instead of fear.

“Yeah, right.” Walter grumbles back.

Abigail doesn’t bother to respond. She disappears into the hall and takes the stairs two at a time, fighting back tears.

Dinner is rather quiet. They sit in their regular places and Jack takes up a space in between Molly and Will while she and Wally sit next to each other. Abigail has been mostly quiet throughout the chatter, feigning exhaustion from class. She’s good at looking tired, so Jack doesn’t pay too much attention to her.

She can tell her father is worried about her, considering how he keeps looking at her out of the corner of his eye whenever Jack isn’t looking at him.

“You have a nice life here.” Jack says fondly from across the table, speaking mostly to Will.

Will nods. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m lucky here. I know that.” He replies quietly, and she feels his foot brush hers under the table.

She smiles into her glass to play the part but stays quiet.

Wally shifts in his seat and turns to look at her. “I’m gonna take the dogs out for a pee. Wanna come, Abi?”

Abigail feels a surge of affection for her brother and she nods. “Yeah, the cold will probably wake me up a bit.” She’s actually itching to get away from this horrible evening, and this is a suitable distraction.

Wally takes off to grab his coat and Abi drains her glass of juice before retreating in the opposite direction. “I left my coat upstairs, I’ll be right there.”

Her coat is actually in the other room, but she wants to linger for a moment.

“How old is he?” Jack asks her parents as she’s walking away.

“Eleven.” Will answers.

“He’s going to be taller than you.”

Will chuckles. “Yeah, his father was.” She hears the chair shift backward. “I’ll come with you both.”

Abigail lets out a shaky sigh. She knows she’ll feel better when they’re outside and away from the intruder. She grabs her coat then creeps silently up the stairs where she’s still in earshot of the kitchen table, and she waits with bated breath as the front door opens and closes and the sound of excited, yipping dogs fades.

“So, whatever he says and wants to do,” Molly says to Jack in a firm voice. “You’ll take him anyway, won’t you?”

Abigail's heart skips. *No.*

"I have to." Crawford answers. "I promise, I'll try to make it as easy on him as I can."

No. No, no, no, he can't.

There is a long pause, and then: "I know what I'm asking, and I wish to God I didn't have to."

Abigail wants to scream. She wants to rush downstairs and scream at Jack Crawford to go away, to leave them alone, to never step foot in their home again. She wants to beg him not to take her father away from her.

But she won't. She has to pretend to be oblivious and indifferent to what's happening. She can't show how afraid she is of the idea of Will going back to where it all started. Where a very important someone is waiting for him to return.

She breathes in deep, then makes a point to run down the stairs with more noise than necessary and jogs past the table to join her Dad and brother outside in the snow.

She knows her father. She knows Will Graham better than anyone, maybe including Hannibal, and she knows that her father won't be able to resist the temptation, and if Will goes to Virginia, he'll suddenly be back in Hannibal Lecter's orbit.

It's the one thing that they never talk about; their shared feelings towards Hannibal Lecter.

Will's constant love and adoration has made it easier to accept herself. Abigail was once a normal kid with a normal family and a normal, average, mundane life. It wasn't until she reached high school that things begin to change as she noticed the change in *His* behavior towards her. (She's taken to referring to her birth father as simply *Him* in her own head. She doesn't like to call him her father.)

When *His* behavior changed, something within her began to grow. She chalked it up to being nothing more than a sense of unease due to the way *He* was suddenly anxious over her leaving home all of the time, because what parent wouldn't be worried about their fifteen-year-old staying out past eleven? So, Abigail would roll her eyes and kiss *Him* on the cheek and go upstairs to sleep, none the wiser of the storm brewing around in *His* skull.

Then came the college trips. Then came the conversations with pretty brunettes and the '*so, do you live close by?*'s and slipping her dad the information on their way out of the train cars. An all-new type of hunting, a whole new language, and a whole new web of lies to keep away from everyone else.

Then came the man on the phone; "*May I speak to Mr. Hobbs, please?*"

Then a knife to her throat, desperate apologies spilled off of bloodstained lips while she screamed and sobbed; "*Daddy, please, I love you, please don't!*"

And then...

“Garrett Jacob Hobbs! FBI!”

In the span of a few minutes, her life was knocked prone and taken away from her. When she opened her eyes in the hospital while the faces of vengeful, betrayed, dead girls danced behind her eyelids, she woke up isolated, orphaned, and ostracized. No one trusted her, and she trusted no one in return.

Well, at least, she trusted very few.

Her loyalty to Hannibal came before her loyalty to Will. The moment she heard him speak, she knew he was the man who had called the house that morning, but yet somewhere behind the veil of his pretty words and soothing voice, Abigail actually did begin to trust him. And... as the months went on, Abigail began to believe that she could even grow to love him.

After her “death”, Hannibal alternated her between the lakehouse and his own home. Due to his reputation and elite social status, plus the added FBI presence, Abigail spent most of her time in his basement, but she was never *bored*. She brushed up on her French with his help, he taught her how to cook and how to play the harpsichord (she was less fond of that, but she did get a kick out of his face whenever she compared him to Dracula).

If she woke up from nightmares, which wasn’t uncommon, Hannibal would hug her tight, soothe her fears, then he would read to her until she fell asleep again. She was never afraid to challenge him when the conversation called for it, but he never reacted with anger. He’d smile fondly and give her a very pointed look that would shut her up.

Then there were the darker activities, like him digging up her father’s corpse to teach her to love him as he loved her, or when he’d tote in a fresh pig for dinner and he’d ask if she’d like to sous chef, but Abigail never said no to that either. In the beginning, all she cared about was making sure she stayed a survivor, but the longer she stayed with Hannibal, the easier it was to imagine her life like this forever.

Even in the kitchen the last time she saw him, when he stood over Will’s broken body, asking for forgiveness she still trusted him. More than that, she cared for Hannibal. Maybe she even loved him. He reached out his hand, *“Abigail, come to me.”*

She had. What else was she to do?

When he curled her in his arms and pressed the cold steel of the blade to her throat, she still loved him. As she was painted in her own blood and dropped to the floor at Will’s side, she still loved him. Her heart was broken and she hated him so much, but that didn’t change the fact that deep inside, Abigail loved him.

Hannibal Lecter understood her. He saw the darkness lurking around inside of her, shoved down between grief and fear and teenage ambitions, and instead of flinching away, he wanted her to indulge, to accept herself as he had accepted her, and how he accepted himself. She learned a lot from Hannibal; many things that she may have not otherwise learned, but things she was grateful to learn. He was a dark mentor who delighted in cultivating beauty. Beauty that he saw inside of her.

And isn't it every child's hope to be accepted and appreciated by their parental figures?

Abigail can't lie to herself and say that she didn't think of Hannibal as a father figure. Hell, she thought of Hannibal as one before she saw Will as one.

That's the one thing she still keeps from Will, that even after all of the pain he put her through, Abigail Graham still loves Hannibal Lecter. It's the only thing she'd ever lie to him about if he asked—though she's certain he already knows, which is precisely *why* he doesn't ask.

Will Graham still loves him. Abigail and her father are implausibly in tune with one another, and sometimes he'll stare off into the distance with that glazed-over look in his eye, and she knows that he's thinking about Hannibal.

But that's why she's terrified to lose him now.

If Will goes with Jack, he'll go see Hannibal. He'll have to. He won't be able to resist the temptation. The two forces of nature that could bring mountains to their knees will be in the same orbit once again, and her father will realize that their life is not enough for them. But Hannibal made it very clear to her the night he cut her throat that she was never more than a bargaining chip. A gift to Will for his loyalty, a pawn in the game, an expandable candidate.

It's been three years since her survival has been publicly declared; he absolutely knows that she's alive and that she and Will are together. She would have left with them that night, had that been an option for her, but Hannibal hadn't wanted her then. Why would he want her now?

If Will returns, Hannibal will make him decide, and if they're apart, Will's choice will be easy. Hannibal Lecter will find a way to make him leave her behind.

Abigail's stomach twists and she looks out over the frozen Maine wilderness in their backyard, allowing the cold air to sting her eyes and make them water a bit so that her father won't ask her if she's been crying.

Wally and the dogs play around by the trees while Will watches stoically. His hands are in his coat pockets and he's eerily still; lost in thought. Squashing down her anxiety, Abigail approaches him from behind. He turns slightly and smiles when he sees her, but it's tight and worried, and it makes her feel worse. Seeing her Dad unnerved is always unsettling.

She tries to smile back at him as she takes her place beside him and childishly grips onto his jacket. Her heart is beating painfully inside her chest as she watches the last peaceful night of her life pass before her eyes. She doesn't want him to go.

Will looks down in surprise when her fingers curl into his coat, and he makes a distressed sound low in his throat before wrapping his arm around her shoulders and tugging her close against his side.

Grateful, Abigail leans her head against her Dad's shoulder, breathing in the scent of his aftershave and the warm, rustic, spicy scent that is so uniquely his. It's comforting but does

little to slow her pulse.

Please don't go, Dad. She wants to beg. But if you must, please let me follow. Please don't leave me. I can't handle this life without you.

Chapter End Notes

"Viens ici, ça va." - Come here, it's okay.

"Que fait Jack ici?" - What is Jack doing here?

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I'm so so sorry it's taken so long for me to post this, but I have been super busy. I know this is a little short, but HANNIBAL IS HERE Y'ALL. We're going to get plotty now, and I hope that you guys continue to enjoy this fic as I navigate the canon with this AU. I have a lot planned, and I'm so excited. Anyway, I hope you're all well, I love you all, and I'll see you soon!
Canary

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dear Will,

We have all found a new life, but our old lives hover in the shadows like incipient madness. Soon enough I fear Jack Crawford will come knocking. I would encourage you, as a friend, not to step back through the door he holds open. It's dark on the other side, and madness is waiting.

Sincerely,

Hannibal Lecter

Will lets out the breath he's been holding for so long and runs his thumbs over the paper. Hannibal's voice speaks the words in his mind, all crisp-cut vowels, smoky accent, and soothing tones. There are shivers still traveling down his spine.

He reads it a second time, then a third, then he drops the whole thing in the open flame and watches it turn to ash.

He watches the flames for so long in fact that he barely notices the sound of footsteps until the bad floorboard gives his visitor away. Will turns towards the noise, and his heart falls to the floor.

Abigail is still shrouded in partial darkness, the light of the fire not quite enough to illuminate her face, but her eyes are large and anxiety is pouring off of her in waves. She's dressed in her pajamas but she looks ready to bolt out the front door. Her eyes flicker down to the fire, and without her saying a word, Will knows that she has been standing there for an awfully long time. She knows what he's done.

"Abigail." He says quietly, mostly because of the late (or early) hour, but also because he doesn't want her to think that he's angry.

Her eyes flicker back to him. "I want to go for a walk." She says just as quietly.

Anxiety grips him tight, but he finds it within himself to nod. "I'll get my boots."

Abigail lingers for a few moments, and right when Will is about to get up, pull her in his arms to comfort her like he always wants to, she turns on her heel and quickly but silently tip-toes out of the room.

The beginning of their shared life began the implementation of codes and languages to keep themselves safe in times of danger. When they want to speak to one another in a public space, but want to minimize the number of possible eavesdroppers, Will and Abigail turn to speaking French. It's simple but easy. They do it at home sometimes as well just to each other, and luckily Molly isn't the type to get upset that she can't understand what they're talking about.

After the incident with Sean McCoy, however, Will decided that only having a single language as a barrier was not enough. They developed a code system with certain words and phrases as a safety net, wrote it all down, memorized it, then destroyed it so that no one else would ever know.

I want to go for a walk is simple compared to the others, but no less important. *We need to discuss something that we cannot discuss in our current setting even in another language*, is more or less what it means. It's one he hasn't heard for quite a while now. Sure, Abigail will sometimes ask to go on regular walks, but Will can always tell the difference when she asks.

All of the dogs are milling about by their legs and enjoying the snow while they trudge through it. They always take them out when they come out this late, mostly for protection, but there's always a sense of nostalgia there; just father and daughter and their pack of strays.

It doesn't feel like that now.

Will glances over at Abigail to his left. She hasn't spoken a word since they left the house, which is very unlike her, and it's worrisome. Abigail is never closed off, not with him, and he silently curses Jack Crawford for allowing their security to be destroyed.

Abigail leads him to their usual spot by the frozen creek, and she leans against the tree. Will follows suit, and for a very, very long time, neither of them speaks. The silence is becoming oppressive, but Will can't actually tell if he's feeling his own anxiety or his daughter's anymore.

"You're going, aren't you?" Abigail states after a while. It isn't a question.

Will hesitates. "I haven't decided."

"Yes, you have."

A part of him wants to argue, to tell her she's wrong, but Will can't. Because he has decided.

“You read his letter. I’m not stupid, Dad, I know what that means.” Abigail sounds so small and sad, and Will feels overwrought with guilt. She knows him so well now, it would be impossible to lie to her. Not that he wants to, but the longer this goes on, he realizes that he already *is* lying.

“If I go, I might be able to save the next family.” He explains gently.

“But it isn’t just them, is it?” Abigail says, her voice raising in volume almost desperately. “It’s Hannibal. You know that you’ll go to see him.”

“I would only go see him if I couldn’t solve it by myself.”

Abigail lets out a frustrated noise and moves away from him, crossing her arms over her chest.

Will aches to reach out to her, but he knows she’d shake him off if he tried, so he doesn’t. He lets out a heavy sigh. “I can’t just... let them die, Abigail, not if I can save them.”

“I know.” She bites out, turning to face him. Her expression frightens him, not because she’s angry at him, but because he knows exactly what she’s about to tell him. “That’s why I’m going with you.”

Even though he expected it, his heart still lurches with dread. “No, you’re not.”

“Tough.”

“I’m not going on *vacation*, Abigail, I—”

“If you were going on vacation, I wouldn’t care!” She shouts back. It’s the first time she’s ever raised her voice at him in anger. Her eyes are bright in the moonlight and shining with unshed tears. “I know how this ends, Dad. If you go back to him, you won’t come back. He’s too important.”

Will steps forward and takes her arms so that she can’t run from him. “Nothing is more important to me than you.” He means every word, he always has. He’s almost shocked that she would think otherwise after all of this time, everything that they’ve done together. Had he never really been able to convince her she’s his entire world? That he would pick Hannibal over her?

Abigail looks doubtful. “It’s not the same thing. You think I don’t know that you think about him all of the time, even though you say you don’t, or you don’t want to? I can see it, Dad, I’ve always been able to see it because I *know you*! You think I don’t know that you miss him? Because I *do*. And you want to know why I know?”

Will clenches his jaw as anxiety begins to make him want to snap. They’ve never talked about this before, and Will was never ready to. He isn’t ready now. “Because you know me?”

Abigail nods, and for a brief second, all of her anger turns to fear, because there’s something else on the tip of her tongue. “And because... I miss him too.”

The wind leaves his lungs in a punched out sort of sound and he has to take a steps away from her. It hurts to hear, and some petty part of him hates that even after all Hannibal has done, after the bond that they have created, Abigail still misses him. But he can't blame her, because in his own fucked up way, Will misses him too. It's been his dirty little secret this whole time, not realizing that his daughter may feel the same way. It tastes bitter and horrible on his tongue when he bites out: "After everything he's done, you'd still go to him?" It's a horrible mirror of the illusion in the hospital, but back then he was speaking to a ghost. He's curious what her answer will be this time.

She nods almost immediately.

"Why?"

"Because you would." She replies definitively. "And you will, when you see him. You won't be able to resist him, because you can't."

"He almost murdered you."

"Yes, but he *didn't*."

"He *meant* to." He throws back, the intensity of the conversation making his voice harsh. "What makes you think he wouldn't do it again?"

A few tears finally escape her eyes and fall down her cheeks, but her rage only seems to intensify. "If he sees me, if I can convince him that... I mean, he won't—"

Oh, but Will isn't listening. A very dark feeling rises in his blood at the thought of Abigail and Hannibal being in the same room together. He will not allow that. "No." He growls back. "You're not going anywhere near him."

"So, you can leave me behind?"

"Abigail, would you *listen* to yourself?" He cries. "Why do you have it in your mind that I'm not going to come back from this? How could you possibly think that after everything we've done?"

"*Because you love him!*" Her declaration echoes in the forest around them, and the power behind it nearly sends him to his knees.

"What?" He chokes out.

Abigail stifles a sob and tries to even her voice out. "You love him, Dad. You've always loved him, and that's why you can't let him go. That's why you waited until Molly was asleep to read his letter, that's why you burned it right afterwards, to leave no evidence when you inevitably can't resist him and never come home again."

Panic is now coursing through his veins. He doesn't love Hannibal. He doesn't. "You don't know what you're talking about."

“Yes, I do.” She argues. “I love him too, Dad. That has never stopped, and you know it hasn’t.”

Will freezes where he stands. His blood runs cold and every intense emotion he held before has evaporated like smoke. So much has happened in such a short period of time, and he’s had no time to process, but all he hears on a loop in his mind is Abigail telling him that she loves Hannibal still. It hurts more than anything else does, for reasons he can’t fathom, and it leaves him feeling gutted. He wonders if this is how Hannibal felt when Will declined his offer to leave together.

Abigail is watching him wearily, and for a second, he wonders if she’s afraid of him. Wouldn’t that just be the icing on the cake?

“It’s okay to love him, Dad.” She says, much quieter this time. “No one else would understand, but I do. He made you feel so much and he made you think about the world differently. He wasn’t good for either of us, but we can hate him for what he’s done and still love him.”

Abigail is right. Deep down, he knows that she’s right, but he can’t take it right now. He’s tried so hard to forget all of this, but now Abigail is throwing it back in his face and forcing him to listen, and he just... can’t. He can’t do this. He has to be a father, that’s the role he signed on for, and he can’t allow this.

“I do not love him.” He states. “I wouldn’t describe my feelings towards him, nor his feelings towards me as love.”

“I would.” She replies just as harsh. “It’s all I would describe them as.”

“Because you want to see it.” He snarls at her, raising his voice for the first time this night. Abigail flinches at the volume, but she stands her ground. “You want to see it so badly, but you’re wrong, Abigail. I don’t love him, and if that’s what he feels for me, then I don’t want it, and neither should you.”

She bites at her lip. “And what if I do?”

Hurt so powerful it threatens to tear him apart overtakes him then. He can’t help it. “Then he has you fooled. Hannibal doesn’t love you, Abigail. You’re not coming with me to prove anything. You belong here. You’re staying, and that’s final.”

As soon as he’s said it, he regret it. He sees the way Abigail’s face falls, how her heart breaks right before his eyes, and he knows he’s fucked up. He said the wrong thing, or at least, in the very worst way he could. Tears begin to cascade down her cheeks, and when he reaches for her out of instinct, she jerks away like his touch has burned her, and his own heart breaks.

“Abigail,” He tries.

She runs from him before he has time to react, and he turns to call her name again as she runs off in the direction of the house, leaving him alone with the rest of the pack. Will stares after

her, tears threatening to fall from his own eyes as he realizes that something has splintered between them, and for once, he has no idea how to fix it.

“Do you have everything?” Molly asks him for the second time as he’s placing his bags down by the door.

Will nods, too tense to speak.

It’s only been a day since Jack came knocking. Will had texted him the morning after saying that he would be there, so the flight didn’t take long to arrange. Will is nervous about the field, there’s no doubt about it, but what scares him more is that since his fight with Abigail, his daughter has been locked in her bedroom. She won’t speak to him, she hasn’t come out, not even for food. Molly left things by her door and they remained untouched.

They’ve never fought like this before. There has never been a time when an issue couldn’t be worked out quickly. Will should have known that it would be this way, considering that nothing with Hannibal Lecter is ever simple, but knowing that he has no time to fix this before he goes is settling like stones in his heart.

Molly approaches him and pulls him into a hug, and Wally hugs him around his waist. The hug is nice, but it feels foreign without Abigail there.

“How long will you be gone, Dad?” Wally asks. He’s much less concerned with this whole thing than anyone else.

“A few days, hopefully. If I can catch him quickly.” He tries to sound positive, and luckily, Walter is nonethewiser. Thank God he’s eleven and hasn’t experienced the horrors of the universe yet.

Wally grins up at him. “You’ll catch him.”

Will manages a smile and he ruffles Wally’s hair. “I’m gonna try.”

“Oh, we know you will.” Molly says, pulling him down for a quick kiss (which Wally makes a noise of disgust for), and wraps her arms around his neck. Will takes comfort in his wife’s arms and tells himself that he’ll be home soon.

When they break apart, Molly turns towards the stairs. “Abigail?” She calls loud enough for her to hear. “Your Dad has to leave, sweetheart, you want to come say goodbye?”

Will cringes at the wording, but his heartbeat quickens in anticipation.

For several long, silent moments, there is no response from upstairs. Another crack forms in his resolve.

Molly turns to him with an apologetic smile, but just as she’s about to speak, Abigail’s bedroom door opens, and the sound of hesitant footsteps can be heard. Will’s breath catches in his throat and his heart begins to pound.

Abigail descends the stairs slowly and sluggishly. She's wearing pajamas and one of Will's flannel shirts that keeps finding its way into her laundry, but she looks exhausted. There are bags under her red-rimmed eyes, and the moment they lay eyes on each other, she has to swallow them back.

Molly ushers Wally out of the room with the task of taking Will's bags to the car to give them a few minutes alone, and Will is grateful to her. Even after the room is empty, Abigail keeps herself by the stairs, her arms wrapped around her torso in a frightened, self-soothing gesture that tempts him to send this whole thing to hell and let the Dragon kill again. It must be better than this, right? It has to be the better option than seeing his daughter fall apart because of him.

She snuffles and squares her shoulders, trying to compose herself. "Be careful. C-call us when you land, just so we know you're..." She trails off and her eyes fill with tears.

Will doesn't waste another second. He moves to her side and sweeps her up in his arms as tightly as he can manage, just as she begins to sob into his jacket. She clings to him, her hands desperately grasping at him like a lifeline. "*S'il vous plaît ne partez pas.*" She sobs.

Will cards his fingers through her hair and cradles the back of her head. "I have to, baby." Abigail doesn't try to argue with him, and he rocks her back and forth. "I'm coming back. I'm going to solve this, and then I'll be home before you know it."

He will come back. He will come back to her. He'd never leave her behind.

"I love you." He whispers in to her hair as another sob rips from her throat. "*Je ne te laisserai jamais seul.*" Will presses. He needs her to understand. "*Tu es tout pour moi. Je reviens.*" He pushes her back just enough so that he can wipe the tearstains from her cheeks. He looks her in the eye while he does this, hoping she can feel the love pouring from him, but she still looks frightened despite his best efforts. He kisses her forehead and cradles her against him again. "I'm coming back." He reiterates it over and over as she finally begins to calm down.

"I love you, Dad." She murmurs brokenly.

"I love you too. So much."

Abigail does watch him and Molly pull away from the driveway but from the safety of her bedroom window where he can't see her cry.

As the house disappears into the distance in the mirror, Will feels a sick sense of dread.

Molly takes her hand off of the steering wheel and places it on his thigh. "She'll be alright, honey. We'll take care of her."

Will barely hears her.

“There is something else I can do.” Will says carefully. “I can wait until I’m driven to it by desperation, in the last days before the full moon, or I could do it now, while it might be of some use.”

Jake is watching him cautiously, knowing exactly what he’s going to say. “Is there an opinion that you want, Will?”

He could almost scoff. “It’s a mindset I need to recover.” He pauses as anticipation floods his veins. “I have to see Hannibal.”

The walls of the BSHCI greet Will as he thought they would; cold, suffocating, and familiar. He walks slowly towards Hannibal’s private cage that Alana has set up for him, unable to hear anything besides the desperate pounding of his beating heart.

He tries to envision they’re somewhere else, somewhere beautiful, somewhere not the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane... somewhere more fitting for their first meeting after all of this time. When he enters the room and lays eyes on the figure with his back to him, the outside world begins to fade.

Then Hannibal turns. Then Will sees his face.

“Hello, Dr. Lecter.”

“Hello, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

S'il vous plaît ne partez pas. - Please don't go.

Je ne te laisserai jamais seul. Tu es tout pour moi. Je reviens. - (Roughly) I will never leave you alone. You are my Everything. I will be back.

Chapter 9

“That’s the same atrocious aftershave you wore in court.”

“Hello, Doctor Lecter.”

“Hello, Will.”

Hannibal doesn’t really look older. Not that Will expected him to be decrepit after three years, but he expected a more apparent change. He’s thinner, that’s for sure—most likely from the shitty prison food that would certainly taste rotten at its freshest to Hannibal’s exceptional palette. (Abigail once described it as “boujee”, which at the time, had made absolutely zero sense to him.)

Will finds that he hates how short Hannibal’s hair is. It doesn’t take away from how striking Hannibal looks, all poise, proper, handsome, and well-groomed, but it makes Hannibal look like a regular prisoner. He blends in with the rest of the population, like he belongs among common killers and drug dealers. Will doesn’t like it.

He doesn’t want to think about why it bothers him so much.

Hannibal is still looking at him, scrutinizing his face in the most tender way. “Did you get my note?”

“I got it. Thank you.” He answers. Calling it a “note” feels odd. It makes Will think of passing letters behind the teacher’s back in the middle of class. Now that he’s thinking about it, that’s exactly what it was. Hannibal knew that the letter would be read before it got sent.

“Did you read it before you destroyed it? Or did you simply toss it into the nearest fire?”

Will feels his stomach twist. Of course, Hannibal knows he destroyed it. “I read it... and then I burnt it.”

“And you came anyway.” Hannibal’s voice drops low, and a shiver runs down Will’s spine. He sounds whimsical and intense at the same time. He takes a step forward, and Will has to fight the urge to step back. “I’m glad you came.” He says. “My other callers are all... professional. Banal psychiatrists and grasping second-raters. Pencil lickers.”

A rude remark sits on Will’s tongue like iron, but he swallows it down. He can’t afford to get into a verbal sparing match with Hannibal Lecter. “I want you to help me, Dr. Lecter.” He says instead.

“Yes, I thought so.” A pause, and then: “Are we no longer on a first-name basis?”

Ignoring his heart pounding, Will replies: “I’m more comfortable the less personal we are.”

Hannibal's eyes glint at him in the dim light of the room. He's struck a chord and Will braces himself. Hannibal inhales deeply as he takes in Will's scent. "I smell dogs... and pine and oil beneath that shaving lotion." He tilts his head ever so slightly, and Will can't look away. "It's something a child would select, isn't it? Is there a child in your life, Will?"

Will's heart drops to his stomach. He thinks of Abigail back home and reminds himself that she's safe. He doesn't answer.

Something dark and fierce passes over Hannibal's expression, but other than that it's almost completely unreadable. "I gave you a child if you recall."

Breathe in, one, two, three, four...

Hannibal still hasn't mentioned Abigail by name, but there's no way he couldn't smell her on him. Maybe he's waiting to see if Will tells him to his face that it's the same child, or if he'll mention Walter instead. Surely he must know though, it's been three years since it was made public. No, he has to know. He just won't say anything unless Will does first. That's the game. It's always the game.

Will is so grateful he convinced Abigail to stay home.

Breathe out, one, two, three, four.

"I came about Chicago and Buffalo. You've read about it."

If Hannibal is annoyed about the sudden change of topic, he doesn't show it. "I've read the papers, I can't clip them. They won't let me have scissors, of course." He says this with one of his serpent-like smiles. Will can't look away from it. "You want to know how he's choosing them."

He nods. "Thought you'd have some ideas."

Hannibal stares at him, not like he's looking through Will, but he's peeking behind the curtain from where he stands outside the barriers of Will's mind and heart. He's peeling back the layers. Will feels almost exhilarated at the intensity of his gaze. Hannibal's attention has always been singular, obsessive, and all-consuming. It's like worship. "You just came here to look at me. Came to get the old scent again."

Will's heart skips.

"Why don't you just smell yourself?"

It's too much. This is too much. Will won't give him the satisfaction. Hannibal doesn't know him. He scoffs like he's disappointed and turns to leave. "I expected more of you, Doctor." He spits back. "That routine... is old hat."

Just as he's about to walk away, Hannibal steps forward again, obviously not ready to have this conversation end. "Whereas you are a new man." Hannibal looks him up and down, seeing the cracks in his resolve and using them as fuel. "Are you a good father, Will?"

This time, Will almost snaps back. *I'm a better father than you ever could be*, he wants to say. But, between the lines, he hears yet another jab from Hannibal in a dream; *What father wouldn't butcher and dine on the intruder who threatened his child?*

Will certainly is a new man; Hannibal saw to that. Not a good one, certainly not an innocent one, but one who has strived to do what the rest of the world couldn't when it came to protecting himself and something precious to him.

He wants to hate Hannibal for being able to read him the way he does; thoroughly and bringing out everything dark that Will hides and tries to ignore. He glares, pouring all of his emotion into it.

Luckily, Hannibal seems to know that Will isn't going to give him anything, so he switches up again. A petty attempt at throwing Will off. "Let me have the file. An hour, and we can discuss it like old times."

"Thank you." Will says, and he means it.

Together, on opposite sides of the glass, they approach the sliding drawer where Will can pass him the file. Will feels Hannibal's eyes boring into him the whole time and he makes a point to look down at the floor. He won't give him the satisfaction.

He places the file inside and sends it through.

"Family values may have declined over the last century, but we still help our families when we can." Hannibal says, making him look up. Standing so close, despite having a cage to divide them, Will feels intoxicated by their proximity. He's threatened by Hannibal's presence that hangs over him like a shadow, but drawn in by what the darkness holds. He holds his breath so that Hannibal doesn't hear it shaking.

"You're family, Will."

Will doesn't know what else to do. He walks away, leaving Hannibal alone with his thoughts and the file.

He waits until he's down the hall to haul himself into a small alcove hidden from view to collapse against the wall and retrain himself on how to breathe.

"I had the absurd feeling that he walked out with me. Had to stop outside the doors, look around and make sure I was alone." Will tells Alana. His voice is steady but there's still a tremor in his hands that he's hiding by his coat.

"I know that feeling." She answers. Will is certain that she does. She looks incredibly annoyed afterward and gives him a sarcastic little smile. "Well, at least Jack Crawford is pleased."

Will laughs a little at that. Alana's disdain for Jack's motives always make him happy. "He showed me pictures of the families." He says, tossing his coat down onto the chair. "I looked

at Molly and Walter and... and Abigail, and I couldn't say no."

"And Jack was counting on it." She sighs.

Will can't argue with that. He moves to sit beside her on the sofa and lets out a sigh of his own. He's just about to ask about Margot when Alana speaks again.

"How is Abigail doing?" She sounds genuine, mildly concerned, given why he's here.

Will smiles, but it's quickly dampened when he thinks about how he left it. "She's good. Going to UMaine in the spring, she does ballet classes three times a week. And she learned how to kickbox."

Alana breaks into a bright, sincere smile. "That's wonderful to hear, Will. She's a bright girl. How are you feeling about her going off to college?"

He winces internally. "I'm... sad she's leaving home, but I'm proud of her. And the campus is close, so she'll be home a lot." It isn't a lie. He is proud of her, though the thought of having her away from him is... uncomfortable. Not Garret Jacob Hobbs murder-a-bunch-of-girls-who-look-like-her levels of uncomfortable, but certainly enough.

Alana is watching him, looking for something she isn't sure she's going to find. "Is she back home?"

"Yeah. She wanted to come with me. I told her no." His heart tightens briefly as Abigail's tear-stained face flashes through his memories. It hurt so much to see her cry like that, knowing it was his fault. "She wasn't happy about it, but she listened."

Alana squeezes his arm. "That was the right thing to do. She's seen enough horrors; she doesn't need to see more."

Will lets out a breath. He definitely agrees with her. Desperate to change the subject, he smiles at her and says: "You still with Margot?"

And then Alana grins, and Will breathes easy that the conversation is over until Alana makes a quip about the devil and Will gets that feeling again, like Hannibal has followed them into the room. He gets up and paces toward the window.

"I'm not letting him in, Alana." He says, and he means it. "Don't worry about me."

"I'm not just worried about you. Last time, it didn't end with you."

Will flinches, and he's thankful that his back is turned. An onslaught of terrible memories bombard his thoughts; Jack bleeding out in the pantry, Alana on the pavement outside covered by Will's coat, and Abigail's frightened expression as Hannibal held out his hand and beckoned her close.

Will knew what he was going to do. He knew that Hannibal was going to kill her and make him watch so that Will understood and all he could do was lie there, choking on his own

blood while he begged and begged for him to let her go. Hannibal intended for Abigail to die that night. She survived by pure happenstance.

He thinks of his daughter, safe in her bed back in Maine, eagerly waiting for him to return. Hannibal can't take her from him now. He won't let him.

"How is he choosing them?"

"How did you choose yours? A ready-made wife and child to serve your needs. A stepson or daughter..." Hannibal trails off, noting Will's expression when he says 'son'. "A stepson absolves you of any biological blame. You know better than to breed. Can't pass on those terrible traits you fear the most."

It's thick and resentful on Hannibal's tongue when he says it, but Will can't argue and say that Hannibal isn't correct. He looks at Abigail and he sees himself. He sees Hannibal. Any child that came from his blood would be the same. When he looks at Walter and Molly, he sees the person he wants to be. The person he thought he was. The person he could have been.

How much longer can he ignore that it no longer matters what he wanted to be or could be?

Will chooses not to respond. He doesn't want Hannibal talking about his family at all, but this somehow still feels safer than him mentioning Abigail. Though, maybe it should be concerning that he hasn't. At all.

"If you're smart, you'd use me. All psychopaths are narcissists; they *love* to read about themselves." Freddie calls after him as he's storming away.

He isn't going to entertain her. He stays quiet.

But leave it to Freddie fucking Lounds to dig into a pressure point.

"What was Hannibal's reaction when he found out about Abigail Hobbs?" She nearly shouts.

Will freezes in his tracks, his blood both icy cold and boiling hot at the same time. Fucking Freddie Lounds.

"Or, I suppose it's Abigail Graham now, isn't it?"

He turns to face her, and he can tell by the way she falters that she's seen something in his eyes. Probably the same thing Sean McCoy saw. "If you write a word about her," He begins slowly, sounding incredibly calm for how angry he really is. "I will make sure you get indicted."

Freddie looks surprised. "On what grounds?"

He smiles, but there are too many teeth and it looks more like a snarl. “Oh, I’m sure I can find one.”

He turns away before she can reply.

“There was no one to claim her, so... I claimed her.” Will says, smiling softly at the hound on his motel room floor. He’ll let her on the bed if she wants later.

“You’re a very sweet man.” Molly says, approval and affection making her voice warm. It makes him nauseous. He doesn’t feel sweet. He feels disconnected. He feels like a liar.

He runs a hand over his face. “How is she?” He asks.

“Abi’s okay. She’s eating again, but she’s quiet still. Wally got her to take him to the movies and the mall yesterday, but he said she was distant.”

The words feel like stones in his heart. He’s sent Abigail a few texts here and there, just so that she knows he’s alive and okay, but he hasn’t gotten a response. He’s grateful that Molly is there to help her.

There is a static pause that’s becoming oppressive in the background. Molly has something else to say.

“What is it?” He asks, anxiety making his voice sharp.

“I wasn’t going to say anything because I know how hard this is for you, but since she won’t tell you either, I feel like I need to.”

Will sits straight up, his heart pounding.

“Abi is having nightmares again. Not screaming ones, thank God, but I hear her wake up some nights. She didn’t want me to tell you because she didn’t want you to worry, but—”

“I’m already worried.”

“I know you are. But it will all be alright, honey. She’ll be alright. I love you, and I miss you, and you’re doing the right thing.”

Will’s stomach churns. In the back of his mind he knows he should say it back, but it’s like the words are stuck in his throat, unwilling to come out. *Unwilling to lie.* A voice that sounds eerily similar to Hannibal’s notes.

Molly, unaware of his turmoil, continues on. *“It’s costing you too, I know that. I’m here, and I’ll be here whenever you come home. And so will she.”*

Will closes his eyes. This started out as him reaching out for comfort from his wife, but now that he has it, he wants to shed it like a skin that doesn’t fit right. This feels... wrong.

“Goodnight, Molly.”

“Goodnight, sweet man.”

He hangs up the phone.

In his dreams that night, he sees himself standing over the mutilated bodies of Molly and Abigail in their beds while he stands in victory, coated in blood.

He wakes up screaming. He feels like he’s bursting at the seams.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Hiya!

So, I decided to skip ahead a little in the storytelling just so no one gets bored because the next few chapters are very important. But here we are, the home invasion, Abigail's choices, and finally, FINALLY, Abigail and Hannibal are gonna fucking TALK. What do you think, how is Hannibal going to react? There is certainly more to come, and I can't wait to share it with you all.

I hope you enjoy!

Canary

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Save yourself. Kill them all.”

A quiet rattling is what wakes her. Abigail's eyes snap open, instantly awake, and she squints into the darkness of her bedroom while she listens to the sounds the house is making. Part of her is annoyed with the panic that she's beginning to feel stirring in her stomach, but the part of her that's afraid is slowly starting to drown out the other.

During the first few months that she lived with Will in Wolf Trap, she often found herself waking up at every sound their little farmhouse, struck down with fear that someone was always waiting for her in the darkness around any and every corner. Several times, the only solution she could find was to creep downstairs and curl up on the sofa where Will and the dogs were sleeping soundly only a few feet away when the need for proximity and comfort became too much.

Those fears never really dissipated completely due to how long Abigail spent feeling decidedly *unsafe*, but after some time and constant reassurance from Will that nothing would happen to her when he was around, it became easier to just roll over and go back to sleep.

Not anymore.

Even though she hates herself for feeling like a child for wanting to cry and run to her Daddy because she's afraid of the dark, Abigail can't shake it because her Dad isn't *here* and the house feels too big without him.

Another noise startles her out of her panic; this time the sound of the door being opened and closed as quietly as possible.

Someone is inside the house.

Abigail sits up and tilts her head toward the noise. The lack of dogs makes the house seem far too still and without the sounds of either happy yips or warning growls, Abigail knows that whoever it is could be anyone from her Dad to a much more terrifying possibility. Her heart is pounding and she squeezes her eyes shut. *Please, please, please, let it be him. Please be my Dad.*

The noise comes closer, and she realizes with horror that someone is approaching her bedroom door. Every instinct is telling her to freeze but she shakes herself out of it. She has to do something.

As quietly as she can, Abigail shifts out of bed and stands upright. She eyes the bedside table and slips her hunting knife out of the drawer, not bothering to close it. Her hands are shaking but she curls her fingers around it just as the door handle begins to turn.

The door opens silently, and pure relief washes over Abigail when she sees her stepmother on the other side. However, it's quickly replaced by dread when she sees the panic on Molly's face.

Molly puts a finger to her lips. "Get your boots." She whispers. "There's someone in the house."

Oh, God, oh, God, no, no, no. Abigail's mind is going a hundred miles an hour but she forces herself to remain calm. She nods quickly and lets Molly stand watch while she tugs her boots over her bare feet.

Once she's upright, Molly places both of her hands on Abigail's shoulders and leans far enough in so that her voice remains hushed. "Get outside, fast as you can."

Abigail shakes her head. "No, no, what about you?"

"I have to get Wally." Molly urges as she squeezes her shoulders in an attempt to comfort her. "Go, honey, it's okay, just go."

Then she disappears down the hall, leaving Abigail by herself.

Abi weighs her options. Her window has a drop on the other side, so her only option would either be to go out Walter's window, and from there is would only be a short run to the driveway, but something stops her. There's something clawing at the back of her skull, a dark, nagging voice that sounds like one she hasn't heard in person for several years but is still clear as day and familiar as it was the last time it spoke to her.

Embrace this, Hannibal's warm, velvety accent curls around her like he's standing at her back with his arm around her. *Your father will be proud of you, as will I.*

"I can't." She whispers into deadspace. She squeezes her eyes shut, too afraid to move.

Warm, gentle hands caress her shoulders and when she opens her eyes, Will is standing in front of her. Abigail wants to throw herself into his arms but she knows he isn't real. Her

imagination will never be as strong as Will's, or Hannibal's for that matter, but it's good enough, apparently.

"Abi," He says quietly, and the sound of his voice sends tears pricking to the corners of her eyes.

"Dad," She manages to choke out. "I'm scared, I... I don't know what to do."

"Yes you do, baby." Will murmurs. *God*, he sounds so real.

Abigail shakes her head. "It's him, isn't it? It's the Tooth Fairy."

Will's lips press into a thin line and his eyes go very grave. It's all the answer she needs.

A feeling of dread falls over Abigail like a net. Her whole body is trembling and her hand is sweating around the knife. "If he gets me, that's it. I can't fight him." She says hopelessly.

"Then you make sure he doesn't get you." Will tells her soothingly. "Remember who you are."

She gives him an incredulous look. *Not the time for metaphors, Dad*. "Who am I?" She asks anyway, just to keep him talking.

"Ours." Comes a new voice, stronger than before.

Abigail looks to her left and looks upon Hannibal Lecter for the first time in almost four years, struck silent by his sudden presence. He's smiling at her, standing poised and proper against her wall with his hands in his pockets, and when Will turns to face him too, he moves to join them. He strides up like it's always been his place and places a hand on Abigail's head, stroking at her hair.

"You are an anomaly, Abigail," Hannibal tells her calmly. "Your birth father whispered in your ear and sprouted seeds, but you grew into something more than him."

Understanding the implications, she feels the first tug of a smile on her lips. "He was nature, you two were nurture."

Hannibal looks incredibly pleased, and even Will seems to be beaming with pride. "You can survive this because you know how."

"You just have to be brave." Will finishes, fixing her with one of his intense but warm looks.

And just like that, they disappear. Only a second has passed, and Abigail hears Molly opening Wally's bedroom door when she opens her eyes. She breathes in, then lets it out as her father's voice still lingers in the air around her, adjusts her grip on the knife, and steps out into the hallway.

She can hear him now, the Tooth Fairy, walking around quietly on the first floor, getting closer and closer to the staircase. She creeps as quickly and silently as she can toward the end of the hallway, then promptly ducks down behind the wall when she sees the man (*muscular*,

over six feet, mask, boots, pistol in right hand, barely breathing) come into view. She clamps a hand over her mouth to stifle her harsh breathing as his light footsteps ascend the steps.

The Tooth Fairy doesn't see her. He continues down the hall toward the bedrooms and disappears down the second part of the hall. Abigail sees Molly, who had been hiding in Wally's room, run out and head toward the stairs herself, also missing Abi in her hiding spot.

Abigail knows it would probably be best to follow her stepmother and make a break for it, but she can't. She has to try to stall him at least a little so that they can get away.

So, she waits. She hears Molly exit the house, most likely to hide under the porch in an attempt to get to the car, then she also tip-toes down the stairs. *He'll go outside when he realizes we aren't there. If I hide, I have a shot.* She hides in a dark corner, curling her fingers tighter around the knife and forcing herself to breathe easy.

You're the lure. You know what to do.

True to her prediction, the Tooth Fairy comes back downstairs the moment he realizes that the beds are warm and empty and all but storms past her on his way out to the front porch. The door stays open as he paces around, searching for any signs of life.

There's a fire burning inside of her now and it's an unmistakable feeling of power. Abigail Graham is going to survive this because she's survived worse monsters than this, because she's already killed and liked it, and because she's the surrogate daughter of Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham, and there could not be a deadlier combination.

Abigail fixes her eyes on the outside, standing silent right by the door that's still hidden by darkness, and she watches the intruder search. She can see Wally underneath one of the cars, and when the Tooth Fairy turns his back, she sees her stepbrother running underneath the porch. Now she knows where Molly is. She waits.

Just a second later, the car alarm begins blaring, a perfect diversion, and Abigail readies herself as the Dragon comes storming past her with his gun raised as he takes several shots at the car. The noise is enough. She takes her chance.

Abigail slips outside, running towards the danger instead of away. She faces the Tooth Fairy's leather jacket covered back and raises her blade. She stabs the blade forward and up into his back just as he lets out a cry of pain and rage and throws her back, dropping his gun and sending it falling to the ground below. Abigail catches herself before she falls on the slippery porch just as the Tooth Fairy snarls and tries to make a grab for her, then takes hold of the railing and lets herself drop to the snow with a pained grunt.

Then, she runs.

Abigail sees Wally and Molly waiting by the road for her, hidden by snow piles, and when Walter sees her, he begins pointing frantically at her until Molly turns around. "*Where were you?*" Molly hisses as she grabs her shoulder and steers her down the driveway.

Abigail holds up her hands which are coated in blood and Molly balks. “I got him. It’ll slow him down.” She replies. Her voice is steady and strong despite the fear and adrenaline that’s coursing through her veins, and she’s impressed when she realizes she doesn’t feel nearly half as horrified with herself as she did the first time she stabbed someone.

“Did you kill him?” Walter presses urgently.

She shakes her head and swallows down the *‘I wanted to’*.

Molly clearly has things she wants to say, but decides that now is neither the time nor the place, so they continue towards the street, as far down as they can until Abigail sees the lights of a passing car and Molly shoves them off to the side. “Stay here!” She commands.

Abigail grabs Walter’s arms and holds him tight while Molly runs out into the middle of the lane and nearly gets hit by the passing car. Walter screams for her and Abigail holds him back until Molly is waving them over to get inside the back seat.

“I almost killed you!” The angry driver is screaming as she and Wally are clambering into the back.

Abigail takes hold of Walter’s shoulders and holds him underneath her own body, protecting him. “Just stay under me, do not move.” She orders. He nods frantically back at her.

The unmistakable sound of a gunshot and spattering blood pounds against her ears and Abigail looks up just as the driver falls dead to the pavement at Molly’s feet. She turns around and can see the Tooth Fairy has retrieved his gun and is chasing them down the street. “Molly!” She shouts.

Molly crawls into the driver’s seat just as another gunshot rings out and she begins speeding away. Abigail holds her brother tighter against her body, protecting him like Will would protect her, and tries to control her breathing. The shock is starting to catch up with her, and her mind is on a constant loop of: *we made it, we made it, we—*

More gunshots ring out and take out the back window, and Abigail feels a white-hot pain as one of the bullets grazes her upper arm. She lets out a loud cry of pain just as Molly does the same and Abigail realizes with horror that she’s not the only one who’s hurt.

“M-Molly...” She tries.

“I’m fine,” Molly grits back, her voice soaked with pain and shock. “I’m fine, I’m fine, I’m fine...” She trails off and Abigail feels the blood soaking down her sleeve. She chooses not to mention it.

Behind them, despite the pounding in her ears, Abigail hears the monster behind them scream to the mood with a passionate sort of fury she’s never heard before, and it’s the last thing she hears before everything becomes too much, the thread connecting her to consciousness snaps, and she blacks out.

Abigail isn't sleeping. She's pretending to sleep to avoid speaking to nurses, just like she did the first time she was in the hospital, and so far it's proven to be effective. The wound on her upper arm really fucking hurts and she has to avoid shuffling around, but other than that, it's so simple to fool them.

The family got transferred to Virginia at Jack Crawford's personal request, and it's where they've been for the last few hours. Last night seems like light years away now.

The door to her room hisses open and she hears someone take a sharp breath in. Instantly, she knows who it is and her eyes snap open.

Will looks like he hasn't slept in days. His eyes are wide and frantic as he takes her in, and instantly Abigail feels tears of joy and relief pricking at the corners of her eyes. "*Dad.*" She breathes.

"Oh, thank *God.*" Will gasps as he launches himself at her, scooping her up in his arms, mindful of her bandage, and holds her tight. Abigail sinks into her father's welcoming embrace, clutching at his coat as tightly as she can while she breathes in the scent of his cologne and remembers what it's like to feel safe. He's shaking, but so is she, so it's okay. "Did he touch you?" He demands. "Are you hurt?"

Abi shakes her head. "No, I'm fine, I promise. He barely got me."

When he pulls away he immediately begins fussing over her arm, glaring at the offending bandage with pure venom. "They said you were shot." He manages to say. His hand comes up to caress her face. "I thought..." His face crumbles for just a moment as the anticipation of grief washes through them both.

She nods and tugs him in for another hug. "I know. I'm so sorry, Dad."

"Do *not* apologize to me." He orders, though it comes out hushed and gentle. "I'm just so fucking glad you're safe. If anything had..." He trails off painfully and she squeezes him tighter just to prove that she's alive.

"How's Molly?" She asks, feeling a bit guilty that she hasn't asked yet.

Will hesitates for a second, but sighs. "She's alive. She's out of surgery and she's resting, but she's not up yet. Wally is in there with her now."

Abigail nods, not knowing what else to say.

"They said you hurt him." He adds. "What happened? What did you do?"

Abigail's heart seizes up with irrational fear, which he notices immediately because he releases her and studies her face.

"Abi," Will says gently as he rubs her back in a comforting circle. "It's okay, whatever it is. You can tell me."

“I stabbed him.” She says quietly in case anyone else is listening. Will’s eyes go very wide with alarm, and suddenly Abigail finds herself unable to keep from talking. “Molly created a diversion and I went to slow him down. I used my hunting knife. I thought it would be enough to make him hesitate, and then I ran.” She finishes her story, decidedly leaving out her memory palace conversation with him and Hannibal for her father’s sanity.

Will though, looks nothing like the encouraging father that stood before her hours ago and convinced her to go after the Tooth Fairy; he looks... *angry*? “You went after him?” He says in a disbelieving tone. “You deliberately went after him instead of running? *Christ*, Abigail, what were you thinking? He could have killed you!”

At the sound of his voice raising, the heart monitor beside her begins to beep a little faster and it’s only then that Abigail realizes she’s beginning to panic. This isn’t right, this isn’t what’s supposed to happen, he wasn’t supposed to be angry.

Thankfully, Will notices this too and his expression softens into something kind and apologetic as he wraps his arms around her again and holds her tight. “I’m sorry, baby. I shouldn’t have yelled. I’m sorry.”

She lets out a shaky breath as her heart rate returns to normal. “I’m sorry, I just... He was in the house and I knew what he was going to do, so I thought... I thought if I could just slow him down then we’d be able to get away. But I messed up, didn’t I?” Her voice breaks on the last syllable as she thinks of Molly.

“No, you didn’t.” Will assures her. “You’re so brave, Abi, I’m proud of you. I’m sorry for snapping at you. It’s been a very stressful few hours.” He sounds so angry and bitter, and instantly, her heart falls into her stomach.

Abigail knows what happened.

“It was him, wasn’t it?” She murmurs brokenly. “Hannibal did this.”

Will lets out a sound that’s close to a growl and he moves so that he’s perched on the bed next to her but he doesn’t have to look her in the eye. “Yes.” He grits out. “I don’t know how, but yes. Hannibal sent the Dragon after all of you.”

Even though Abigail already knows this, hearing it out loud makes her feel sick. It’s the final nail in the coffin.

Hannibal Lecter still wants her dead after all of this time.

She thinks back to the warm, comforting smile her imagination conjured up and flinches away from it. It was all a lie. Her Dad was right. *What was so wrong with me that he feels this strongly about killing me? Is it because of my Dad? Is it me?*

Sensing her struggle, Will makes a soothing noise in his throat and pulls her close so that he can press a kiss to her forehead. “Abigail, look at me.”

She does, but now Will is blurred behind the angry tears that are threatening to overflow.

“You didn’t do a fucking thing wrong.” Will tells her. “You did *nothing* to warrant this. It’s all a game to him, remember that.”

It can’t be that simple, though. It never is with him. I need to know why. I need to.

But Abigail Graham can’t say that out loud, so she doesn’t. She just nods and lets her father hold her until she can convincingly feign sleep, and while she does, she plans.

“I’m just about worn out with your crazy sons of bitches.” Will growls in Hannibal’s face the moment he’s up close. His chest is heaving with rage which is traveling down his arms and making his hands shake. Seeing Hannibal right now, the urge to kill him is so much stronger than it’s ever been, even though deep down he knows he won’t try. Not here.

“The essence of the worst in the human spirit is not found in the crazy sons of bitches.” Hannibal drawls. “Ugliness is found in the faces of the crowd.”

“What did you say to him?”

“‘*Save yourself, kill them all.*’ Then I gave him your home address.” Will grits his teeth to fight back the venomous reply he wants to give, which gives Hannibal an opportunity to dig the knife even deeper. “How’s the wife?”

“How’s my *wife*? ” He snarls back, emphasizing that she’s his just to hurt, but if Hannibal is angered by it, he doesn’t show it. “She’s lucky.” It’s the only response he can think of to give. A part of Will wants to shout at him about Abigail too, but the fact that Hannibal *still* hasn’t mentioned her outside of that first initial dig weeks ago now is what stops him. Will knows better than to give Hannibal fuel.

“She survived the Great Red Dragon. Takes a pinch more than luck.” Hannibal pauses and scrutinizes Will’s face, searching for *something*. “When you look at her now, what do you see?”

Will could almost scoff. “You know what I see.” *Family. My wife. My choice. I chose my path this time and it doesn’t lead to you.*

But Hannibal always knows just how far to push, because he immediately flips the conversation again, leaving Will in the dust to catch up. “Before he became the Red Dragon, this shy boy would have never dared any of this.”

“Well, now, he thinks he can do anything. Anything.” Will hisses, still seething, but there’s a sense of dread that holds over him now when he thinks of his daughter who tried to fight back. “*Anything.*” He emphasizes.

“The Dragon likely thinks you are as much a monster as you think he is.”

“Is this a competition?”

Hannibal smirks a little at the hostility in Will's voice. "*Two souls, alas, are dwelling in my breast, and one is striving to forsake its brother.*" He quotes. "The Red Dragon is freedom to him. Shedding his skin, the sound of his voice, his own reflection. The building of a new body and the othering of himself, the splitting of his personality, all seem active and deliberate. He craves change."

What the fuck are you... Oh.

Oh.

Will breathes in and out to steady himself. "He didn't murder those families..." He tries. "He *"changed"* them?"

There's a flash of something bright and fiery in Hannibal's eyes when he stares Will in the eye and says: "*Don't you crave change, Will?*"

Will doesn't know what to say.

Abigail hates waiting.

At her father's request, she was able to be released to him under the condition that she stay under house arrest in his motel room with armed FBI agents outside until he gets back. With Walter and Molly still at the hospital while her Dad sets up a trap for the Dragon somehow involving Dr. Chilton, Abigail Graham knows it's time to move.

She glances outside the front windows to see the two armed FBI agents that are there to protect her, and she scowls at the backs of their heads. Getting around them won't be easy, but it won't be impossible.

Quickly and quietly, Abigail pulls on her boots and her coat, then pulls her hair down in a way that covers her missing ear and her throat scar, then pulls on a beanie for good measure. She takes a screwdriver from the travel toolkit that her Dad has in his luggage and sticks it in her jacket pocket just in case. She bought a pair of sunglasses before leaving the hospital so she throws those on too, then makes her way to the back window that's much too small for anyone but her to get through.

She hesitates after getting the window open and glances around the room. Remnants of her father are all over the place; his bed slightly messy from where he slept last night, the suitcase on the floor that's open, and the toothbrushes on the bathroom counter. These little things stare at her and for a second, Abigail actually reconsiders what she's about to do.

Her father will be furious. Terrified, actually, when he figures out where she's gone, then angry when he finds her, and he'll shout and probably ground her, but that's not what gives her pause. Abigail knows that this is going to hurt Will. She doesn't *want* to hurt him but she also knows that she *has* to do this. She needs to know. She has a *right* to know.

With that, Abigail lets out the breath she's been holding and crawls out the window.

This was a stupid fucking idea. Abigail grumbles to herself as she's taking the grating off of the vent. It's frigid outside and the icy Baltimore air is blowing against her back and seeping down her collar, but she keeps working. The screwdriver in her hands is miraculously just big enough to actually work against the large bolts and when the last one falls into her palm and she's able to rip the metal grating off, Abigail nearly cries out in triumph. *Maximum security my ass.*

She sets the large grate off to the side and then crawls her way into the vent, only pulling the metal slab back over the hole to cover her tracks before moving forward.

She has absolutely no idea where she's going, but she knows that before long, she'll find where she needs to go. The Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane is large, but there's only one room that Abigail needs.

The vent shaft is small but Abigail thanks her tiny frame for allowing her through. She crawls forward and then has to haul herself into a standing position when the opening goes upward. It takes her several tries to actually reach the upper opening and by now the cold has faded and she's actually sweating with exertion from trying to be silent.

All of Abigail's nerves are on fire, be it fear or anticipation that she's gotten so far, she doesn't know, but when she sees orderlies and guards through the metal vents below her, she *does know* she's heading in the right direction.

Several minutes pass before she finds herself above the hallway near an *Employees Only* room. An orderly walks out of the room below her, adjusting his scrubs, and Abigail smiles. *Got you.*

The orderly, unaware of the intruder in the vent over his head, disappears down the hallway. Abigail waits several minutes to make sure the coast is clear before she backtracks in the vent, making a right turn at the corner where she finds herself looking down through the metal into the little closet the orderly just left. There's no one else there.

As quietly as she can, Abigail pushes the vent out of place, giving herself a hole to fall through. She drops to the floor below and takes a moment to stretch out her knees which have been screaming the entire time she was crawling. The wound on her arm pulses and throbs in protest, but it doesn't deter her.

Abigail sheds her jacket and takes a pair of scrubs from the hooks, changing swiftly. There's a nurse's badge that controls the magnetic locks on the wall, which Abigail takes and puts around her neck. Disguise now complete, Abigail takes a deep breath, then walks out into the hallway.

There are cameras pointed at her but Abigail keeps her head up and does what Hannibal Lecter taught her; *walk around as if you belonged there from the beginning. No one will question you.*

And that's exactly what she does.

So Abigail walks along, keeping her hair covering her ear and throat as she passes by orderlies who nod and wave at her even though they've never seen her before in their lives. It's a pretty powerful feeling to know she can walk around like she owns the place and no one is trying to stop her. Now she understands why Hannibal Lecter was free for months before they caught him.

Her confidence is stopped short when a group of guards dragging a young male patient between them appears at the end of the hallway. Her heart skips a beat, and without a second of thought, Abigail slips into the little alcove where there are empty hospital beds and chairs she can hide behind. She falls to a crouch and hides behind the bed as the footsteps get closer and closer, careful to keep her legs hidden. She could have stayed walking, but if they asked her to help with the patient and she faltered, they might discover she's not who she appears to be.

So, Abigail hides. She waits with bated breath, peaking through the underside of the bed out to the hall where the guards and the prisoner are approaching quickly.

"Quit dragging your feet, kid, I got a schedule to keep." One of the guards growls at the prisoner.

There's a grunted response and a scraping sound as the prisoner's feet are dragged across the floor, followed by a small scuffle as the prisoner trips.

"*Goddammit*," The second guard sneers. "Watch where you're stepping."

But it's too late. The prisoner falls forward, sprawled on his stomach on the floor, landing right in front of the bed, putting Abigail directly into his eye line.

Her heart seizes up with terror and she tries to shrink back against the wall, but it's too late for that too. The prisoner on the floor is looking right at her.

The guards are moving around him to readjust his chains so he doesn't trip again, but they each have their backs to her and haven't noticed her. Only the prisoner can see.

The prisoner is young, that much is certain, with short brown hair, and dark, surprisingly focused eyes. He looks slightly familiar, probably a face she's seen on the news, given where she is, but there's something about the way he's looking at her with his piercing eyes that tells her this man, whoever he is, is actually *seeing* her.

Terrified, Abigail raises her finger to her lips to keep him quiet.

The prisoner stares back, watching her carefully.

Abigail flattens her palm over her chest and moves it in a circle for the ASL sign for *please*, then mouths the word back at him, begging him not to give her up, *please, please, please*.

After a second, a very brief smirk pulls at the prisoner's lips, and Abigail knows immediately that she is safe.

Thank you, she signs back, genuinely meaning it. The prisoner actually *winks* at her then, and she tries smiling back, despite how scared she is. She doesn't know why she's trusting this prisoner in a high-security hospital, but she isn't one to look a gift horse in the mouth.

The guards haul the prisoner up after that and continue to shove him down the hall. The prisoner doesn't look in her direction a second time, not even when he's towering over her and surrounded by the guards on either side.

"This way, Mr. Brown." The guard says curtly, obviously annoyed.

"It's your world, boss." The prisoner's husky voice answers, sending a chill down her spine.

Abigail counts to sixty after they disappear around the corridor, and only then does she get up. She looks left, then right, then continues trekking toward her destination.

When Abigail finally finds the door she's looking for, she suddenly regrets coming. What is she going to say? What is she going to tell him? *God*, she should have planned this part out.

But, she's come this far, so she has to try.

With shaking hands and a thundering heartbeat, Abigail lifts the keys to the magnetic lock and swipes in through. The mechanism makes a little buzzing noise as it's disarmed. This is it.

Abigail Graham takes the handle and pulls the door open just enough to slip inside, then swipes the card again to release the second lock. She pulls the door open and takes her first steps into Hannibal Lecter's personal cage.

The room is sparse and bare, blindingly clear with the fluorescent lights overhead, and through the glass wall, Abigail sees him.

Oh, fuck.

Hannibal has his back to her, but he's standing at a desk reading a newspaper. She takes another step toward him.

Something in his posture changes, and Abigail can tell without seeing his face that he can smell her now because he suddenly straightens up to his full height. Fear swirls around in the back of her mind but she's reassured by the cage.

Hannibal turns, fixing his eyes on Abigail in the doorway. She holds her breath.

Chapter End Notes

Anyone else excited to see Matthew Brown?

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Hello! Sorry to keep you all waiting for so long, this was actually a pretty difficult chapter to write, so it took me longer than I thought it would. But I know y'all have been waiting, so I hope this is okay. I hope you like it. Everyone is about to talk through their feelings, so I promise, good things are coming.
Canary

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

For a very long time, nobody speaks. Everything is still except for the distant humming of the air conditioning and the sound of Abigail's racing heart that's certainly loud enough for Hannibal to hear by now.

Oh God, Hannibal.

He's standing eerily still, a great impression of a statue you'd see looming in the back of a graveyard, one that seems to be still staring into you even after you've turned your back. He looks different too, thinner and more angular in the face than she remembers with just the slightest hint of softness around the middle from years confined to small spaces. His hair is shorter too, but all around, Hannibal Lecter looks the same.

Abigail doesn't know what to say. She's envisioned this so many times, but now that she's here and he's *right there*, every single word in both languages she knows has flown out the fucking door. She's afraid to even breathe.

Hannibal blinks once, the only movement in several seconds now then seems to come back to life. He rotates his body so that he's facing her, his movements quick and smooth like a snake. His eyes never leave her face for even a second.

"Hello, Abigail."

A shiver tugs at the base of her skull and rolls down her spine with enough power to almost send her knees buckling. He sounds like rich honey and hellfire and *God* she's missed that voice. She takes a few breaths to steady herself then swallows down her fear. "Hello, Hannibal."

A Sphinx-y smile pulls at the corner of his mouth, but he stays silent. It takes her a minute to realize that he's waiting for her to speak first. It's so hard to read him because his face is blank, giving nothing away. Is he happy to see her? Is he angry? He doesn't *seem* angry, but he's always been good at hiding his real emotions.

Abigail walks closer to the cage on shaky legs, stopping only a few feet from him. He seems taller somehow, but she knows that it's mostly just his presence that makes him seem so large. Her heart is beating so fast and every muscle is clenched tight with tension that she hasn't felt in a long time. "You look... different." She tells him clumsily.

Hannibal's eyes sparkle with a hint of amusement. "Many things have changed since we last met."

"Yes, they have." She replies. "Are you surprised to see me?"

"I am, in fact." He answers, seeming amused by the fact instead of upset. "I doubt they let you in the front door."

Abigail feels a sudden rush of pride. She's never done major breaking and entering before, and it worked so well, how could she not be proud? "I came in through the vents and stole a uniform. Walked in like I owned the place."

This time, Hannibal does smile and he looks *proud* of her. "Very well done." He replies, then takes a step toward her. "Tell me, how does Will feel about this?"

She flinches a bit. "He doesn't know. I snuck out."

"Yes, I imagine you did. You always were very good at that, weren't you? Jumping the wall to escape the confines of the hospital just to feel free, yet here you are, crawling through the vents in a place where no one is supposed to be free by design." He cocks his head, studying her face. "Your father is going to be very angry with you."

"I know that."

"Yet you came anyway."

"Well, I had to." She snaps, suddenly irritated with all of this. She has things to say and she has no idea how long it's going to take for the hospital staff to find her. "You forced my hand. You always do."

He raises an eyebrow in a calculating way. "Did I?"

"You sent the Dragon after me. I want to know why." Abigail squares her shoulders and crosses her arms over her chest.

Hannibal regards her with eyes that are somehow intense and empty all at the same time. It's like staring into a bloodstained abyss where cruelty and kindness coexist to the point of overlap. She was never very good at reading him, and the last time she misunderstood, she got her throat cut. The memory makes the mark on her neck burn, and it's almost enough to make her step back, but she doesn't dare move.

Hannibal still hasn't answered her, but the longer they stand in silence, the less she needs him to actually tell her anything. She gets it.

“You don’t want my Dad to have anything that isn’t you.” She says, voice thick and choppy. “Three years you’ve sat here, waiting for him to come back, and now that he has, you want to strip him of everything he’s built in your place.” A tight, humorless laugh breaks out of her chest. “Even me.”

“Paint that causes a stain is hard to remove, even if you strip it.”

Abigail scoffs as indignation builds. “But it’s not impossible. You’ve never been bound by laws of probability. You’re more than capable of bending the rules to suit your needs, and I’ve always been on the wrong side of the tracks where you’re concerned.” The words are laced with venom and ire.

Hannibal cocks his head, considering. “I would argue you were always right where you needed to be.”

Her breath catches painfully and she has to swallow down the sudden appearance of tears. She doesn’t want to cry in front of him. “Yeah.” She grits out. Her throat feels like sandpaper. “I’m getting that now. A lot of things are making sense, actually.”

“The gift of clarity.”

“Oh, I have clarity,” Abigail growls back. “It’s obvious what you think of me, just like it’s painfully obvious that I never meant anything to you outside of proving a point to my Dad.”

Hannibal’s eyes flash, but she keeps going.

“But this time you got it wrong. I’m not the same person I was when you tried to kill me, I’m stronger than that. I played your stupid little fucking game with the Dragon, and I won. I have a bullet hole in my arm to prove it, so what you’ve accomplished here is absolutely fucking *nothing!*”

Abigail’s voice echoes in the small room, ringing back into her ears. Or maybe that’s the alarm bells going off in her head at having poked the monster once again. The monster that is currently staring at her with an eerie blankness that could mean anything and everything.

“*God,*” She sobs as the fight leaves her body and she sinks to her knees in front of the glass. She doesn’t know what else to say now. She just feels numb.

She hears footsteps in front of her and she looks up just in time to see Hannibal sinking down to sit on the floor in front of her, his eyes never once leaving her face. He crosses his legs and folds his hands in his lap. “You did very well, Abigail.” He says gently, voice full of uncharacteristic affection that makes her heart jolt.

“What?”

“I often wondered what this meeting would be like,” Hannibal admits. “Though I was never sure I would be permitted to have it, you have surpassed my expectations.”

Something about his tone makes her suspicious. “You were messing with me. Seeing what I would say.” She guesses. “That’s all I ever was to you; an experiment.”

“No,” He replies. “I was curious about you, yes, but I did want to see how you would flourish with the right ones to guide you.”

“Did you mean for me to die? Or was I just very lucky?”

There’s a long, pregnant pause before Hannibal speaks again. His lips are pursed into a tight line, and for the first time, he actually seems to be unsure of what he wants to say. “At the time, yes.”

“At the time?” Abigail swallows against the lump in her throat. “And... and now?”

“For years, I pondered what would happen if I were capable of reversing time.” He answers thoughtfully. “Only recently have I discovered that such knowledge is unnecessary. You cannot put together a teacup that was never broken.”

Abigail rolls the words around in her mind, flushing through the layers of metaphors and carefully hidden confessions until...

Holy fuck.

Her jaw drops from shock or maybe horror, and Hannibal’s smile becomes tight and bitter. “They never told you.” She gasps.

“No, they did not,” He confirms. “I suspected nonetheless, but they strategically hid the truth. Dr. Bloom always remained very tight-lipped whenever I spoke about you; Jack Crawford’s doing, I am certain.”

Abigail’s mind is still reeling. “Did my Dad tell you?”

“Not verbally. I could smell you on him. That was my only true confirmation that you had lived.”

“But there were tons of news reports!” Abigail argues though she isn’t really yelling at him. “Articles, interviews, Dad and I had to cross state lines when it came out so that we didn’t get hounded by all of the press. They just... what, never let you see them?”

Hannibal’s jaw twitches and Abigail realizes just how angry he really is about having been kept in the dark.

“He said... My Dad, I mean, he said you knew.”

“I believe that *he* believes that I was made aware, though he was just as reluctant to mention you as they were.”

“Can’t imagine why,” Abigail replies without really meaning to.

Hannibal doesn’t seem to be upset; actually, he seems amused. “Not at all.”

Will doesn't think he's ever felt this scared in his life. He grips the steering wheel of his rental so tightly between his fingers that he's certain there are imprints of his knuckles embedded in the leather, but he can't whatever pain might be screaming at him. He's too busy screaming on his own.

Literally screaming; his throat feels raw from it now.

It took everything within him to not reach into the phone and strangle the agent when the idiot called him, and he's still not sure if he won't kill him anyway.

"Abigail's gone."

"What the fuck do you mean 'she's gone'?"

"She's not here, Mr. Graham, I don't know what happened. I think she went out the window."

Even replaying it in his head sends nausea swirling through his belly. *Abigail's gone, Abigail's gone, Abigail's gone.*

But she isn't gone; he knows *exactly* where his daughter has run off to. She's tactical, resourceful, and brave, and she's run straight to the lion's den, ready to question, poke, and prod until she gets the answers she came for.

In his heart, Will already knows that Abigail has found a way in to see Hannibal, though he doesn't know exactly how or what she's done to achieve her goal. He knows they're alone, that they're talking, and that scares him more than anything else.

And because... I miss him too.

He wasn't good for either of us, but we can hate him for what he's done and still love him.

I love him too, Dad. That has never stopped, and you know it hasn't.

With a growl, Will pushes down the gas pedal even more, his FBI badge at the ready for any Baltimore cop that dares to pull him over. *Not today.*

Will supposes he can't blame her for wanting to know why. Hell, he sailed to Lithuania to solve the puzzle that is Hannibal Lecter, all while still aching and hoping that once he found him, somehow things would be different between them. What a fool he'd been.

And now Abigail has fallen into that same trap.

And it's all his fault.

They should have talked about this. They should have sat down like parents and kids are supposed to and talked because if Will had actually been the father he was supposed to be, this never would have happened. He hadn't even recognized his failure for what it was, not even when they were standing in the woods and Abigail was trying to convince him to take her along. He was so tied up in easing her fear that he neglected to see that her fear was his fault to begin with.

He's lost count of how many times he's failed her now.

He pushes his car a little faster, and when the walls of the BSHCI come into view, Will vows to never make a mistake like this again.

"I have to ask you something," Abigail begins slowly. They haven't moved from their spots on the floor on either side of the glass divider. It feels like therapy.

"Please."

"All those times..." She trails off, suddenly not sure she wants to know.

Hannibal doesn't press, he just keeps watching her with that aggravating, blank expression, giving her no idea what he's actually thinking.

She takes a breath to steady herself and keeps her eyes on his shoes instead of his face. He won't just tell her; if she wants to know, she has to ask, but she's too afraid to face him for it. "I thought you cared for me. Even when you were scaring me, I... I thought that you were caring for me the only way you knew how. Was I wrong?"

"No."

"Please don't lie to me," She pleads as tears begin to blur her vision. "Were you just trying to make me dependent on you, or did you want to make me dependent because you cared? I want the truth. I *deserve* that much." Then, as an afterthought; "Please, Hannibal."

There's another long pause, and then a low, slow intake of breath. "Abigail, look at me."

She's never been able to refuse him. She does.

His expression is still blank, but in his eyes is a storm of conflicting emotions, none of which she has the capacity to name. "I have always cared for you, Abigail, in my own way. That was never a lie." There's so much warmth in his voice, so much gentle affection that Abigail's heart takes it and holds on tight. She wants to believe him so badly.

"Would you kill me if you could?"

"What reason would I have?"

"You tried once when you had no reason." She replies icily. "No *reasonable* reason, anyway."

The corner of his mouth pulls up into a smile and he suddenly looks very fond, no doubt thinking of how much she sounds like Will. "I do not wish to kill you, Abigail."

"But how do I believe you?" Her voice is quiet and broken. She wants to believe him, but she can't.

Hannibal lets out a sigh, but it doesn't sound impatient or irritated. "You simply have to decide for yourself."

Suddenly unable to sit any longer, Abigail huffs and gets to her feet so she can pace in front of the cage. Hannibal mirrors her, drawing himself up to his full height to loom above her. She can't tell if he's deliberately trying to make himself look threatening, or if he's always been that terrifying, but she makes herself not look at him. She doesn't want him to know that she's afraid.

"You look like him. Did you know that?" Hannibal says, his voice full of uncharacteristic fondness.

Abigail turns to face him but doesn't look him in the eye. "I look like Will?"

"Oh, yes. Three years you've been at his side; Will has influenced change."

"I'm braver because of him," She can't help the smile that pulls at her lips. "Stronger. Smarter."

"Is he a good father?"

"The best." Abigail meets his eyes and fixes him with a hard look. "He's been an amazing father."

Hannibal smiles, and it's just as affectionate as his tone. "I was not exaggerating when I stated that you look like him. Especially when you're scowling at me."

The laughter that bubbles out of her is surprising, but undoubtedly, Hannibal is pleased by it. It's surprising really, just how easy it is to talk to Hannibal like this. She expected a lot more yelling; not that Hannibal ever raised his voice, but definitely yelling from her end. But despite everything, now that she's here in front of him...

It suddenly feels like her fingertips are magnetic, and she reaches her hand out without really meaning to. Hannibal's eyes track her movements, and she pauses. "C-can I?" She whispers.

Hannibal doesn't say anything, but raises his own hand toward the small circular air holes that are carved into the glass, and places his fingers just at the edge. An invitation, a welcome.

Very slowly, Abigail lifts her shaking hand and presses it against the cage, within touching distance, but not quite. "You're not going to... bite my hand off or anything, are you?" She asks cautiously.

Hannibal chuckles lightheartedly, which isn't an answer, but Abigail supposes it's up to her to decide. Like he said.

What else is she supposed to do?

Abigail releases the breath she's been holding, then curls her fingers around the edge of the cutout and allows Hannibal Lecter to touch her for the first time in over three years. The very

same hand that held the knife to her throat brushes against her skin, warm and heavy and familiar. Their eyes meet, Abigail's tear-filled and wide, Hannibal's soft and sparkling, and everything falls away around their bodies.

When Abigail blinks, they're no longer in the BSHCI and separated by a glass cage. The modern but elegant walls of Hannibal's kitchen in Baltimore greet her like an old friend. The stove behind her is sizzling, and by smell alone, she knows that Hannibal is making her High-Life Eggs. Hannibal is still touching her hand, but when she looks down there's a cutting board and a knife instead of a glass cage. *Teaching me how to cook.*

"I've missed you," She finds herself whispering.

Hannibal's answering smile is startling and warm and it makes her heart ache.

The peaceful moment is broken at the sound of rushed footsteps outside, and Abigail pulls away from the cage with a startled breath. She already misses the kitchen.

The double doors swing open and everything goes to hell. Will is at the forefront of the ambush, stone-cold and furious, as he's pushing his way into the room. He only glances at Abigail for a second, a quick up and down to ensure she's alright, but the look in his eye is so frigid that it chills whatever warmth was in Abigail's body. God, he's angry. More angry than she thought he would be, and she knew he was going to be furious, but it's worse than that. Right now, for the first time, Will Graham genuinely looks like he hates her.

Much too soon, his eyes fix on Hannibal and it reminds her of the way animals watch their prey before they maul them. If Will hates Abigail, he certainly hates Hannibal more, if it's possible. The murderous intent is written on every line of his face.

Alana Bloom is right behind him, jogging quickly on thin heels with the same outraged expression, though it's nowhere near as hateful as Will's. Behind her are a handful of guards with their guns all raised directly at Hannibal's head, though out of everyone in the room, he is ironically the one who seems the least concerned. Actually, he looks rather pleased.

"Hello, Will," He says casually.

Will's lips pull back from his teeth like he's ready to take a chunk out of his face, and through clenched teeth he growls: "*Éloignez-vous du verre, Abigail.*"

His voice sends a chill down her spine. *I've never seen him this angry before.* "Dad—" She tries.

"Now."

She flinches back but he doesn't seem to see it. He's too focused on Hannibal to notice her shrinking, faltering, *afraid of him*. Abigail doesn't know what's going to happen now, but she's more frightened now than she's ever been in her life, which is impressive considering how many monsters she's had to survive against.

"Will," Alana says. "Take Abigail into the hall."

“Oh, no.” Will replies with enough ire to make Alana look weary. “I’m going to speak with Doctor Lecter first. On my own.” A hateful little smile pulls at the corner of his mouth. “Just like old times.” It sounds like a threat. It probably is. “You take Abigail into the hall. I will be there shortly.”

Abigail’s heart twists painfully. Without anywhere else to look, she turns to Hannibal with tears in her eyes and finds him staring back at her. He’s smiling slightly, encouraging her, and she holds onto that like an anchor. It’s the only one she seems to have at the moment. “It was wonderful to see you again, Abigail.”

Abigail just smiles sadly back. She doesn’t know if this is going to be the last time they see each other, but even with that knowledge, she can’t find the words. She doesn’t want to say goodbye.

Alana wraps an arm around her shoulders to lead her away, and as she passes by her Dad she tries desperately to get him to meet her gaze, but he *won’t*. She feels like something has severed between them, something she never imagined would happen, but it *has*.

And it’s her fault.

Abigail turns away so that he won’t see her cry.

Chapter End Notes

Éloignez-vous du verre, Abigail. - Step away from the glass, Abigail.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Hello!!

Okay, so I have literally been writing this chapter all goddamn day. Started at 10:10 AM, and it's currently almost midnight. I hope y'all are ready because this is quite long and dialogue-heavy, and it's a very, very important chapter. Will is about to figure his shit out. Sorta. Baby steps. I hope you all enjoy this, and I promise I'll be back as soon as possible!

Love you guys!

Canary

"I imagine that Abigail will be grounded for the foreseeable future."

"That's none of your concern."

Their eyes are locked, have been since Will walked in, and neither seems to want to look away from one another. Will's hands are shoved into his pockets where his fingers are clenched into tight, shaking fists. He keeps them there so that he doesn't reach into the cage and strangle Hannibal to death, no matter how appealing the idea is.

"I would argue it is if you consider *why* she is grounded," Hannibal replies dryly. "She had questions that you could not answer, or did not want to answer because of what it would mean for you. She sought the answers out herself. You should be proud."

"I'm really not." Will growls back. God, he really isn't. He's horrified. Furious. Hurt. Not proud.

Hannibal raises an eyebrow and a small little smirk pulls at his lip. "Are you not?"

"You think I'm *happy* about this?"

"Yes. And that frightens you."

Will lets out a sarcastic-sounding laugh as his anger rises to hysterical levels. He doesn't even want to respond to that.

"You know Abigail as well as I do. Did you really not see this as an outcome?"

He's about to cut Hannibal off when he finishes the first part of that sentence, but the second half gives him pause. Anxiety begins to stir in the corners of his mind because once again, Hannibal is correct. He *did* know that there was a chance that Abigail would try to contact him in some way the moment she was in the same city, but he dismissed it as a ridiculous,

paranoid fear. He told himself to trust his daughter and know that she would do what she needed to protect herself, and he was stupid enough to believe that that meant she would stay in the motel.

He should have known better.

Abigail has never run from Hannibal before. Not once. Not even when she knew he was going to cut her throat did she run in the other direction.

Of course, she wouldn't run now.

Hannibal seems to see his struggle, and it makes that smirk just a little bit sharper. "Of course, you saw it. You just wish you did not. Poor Abigail, always having to choose."

"Is this a *custody battle* to you?" Will demands.

"We do have a daughter together."

"No," He growls back, his rage burning poisonous words on the tip of his tongue. "I have a daughter. You have a class pet."

A steely haze passes over Hannibal's features and Will knows he's struck a nerve. He doesn't care.

"I'm going to say this one time, Hannibal. Abigail is *not* an experiment, and she is not a plaything for you to manipulate. Not anymore. If you *ever* attempt to contact her again after today, I will kill you."

"Every conversation in here is recorded."

Will could almost laugh. "They won't stop me,"

Hannibal smirks again and it makes Will's insides twist to the point of pain. "I was referring to my conversation with Abigail prior to your arrival. I was being as honest with her as I am being with you now."

He's shaking his head. "I don't care. I do not fucking care. You've already tried to take everything away from me, and I will not let you hurt her again. She is *my* daughter, Dr. Lecter, and I would protect her from myself if I had to."

There's a long pause, then: "I believe you think so."

The blood in Will's veins goes ice cold. Dangerous, dark thoughts begin to swarm his mind like flies, and he can't handle it. He can't handle where this conversation is inevitably going to go, not when he still has to deal with Abigail in the hallway. That conversation is more important.

He turns away and starts walking toward the door, leaving Hannibal smug and alone in his cage. *Right where he belongs.*

The car ride is silent and the tension is thick enough to be cut with a knife. Abigail isn't looking at him, and hasn't for over an hour now; she's just looking out the window, shielding her face with her hair so he can't see her, but her reflection has tears on her cheeks. He still doesn't know what to say to her.

He's grateful that Alana is a good friend and has a weak spot for Abigail, which is the only reason that they're able to go back home right now instead of having to watch Abigail get arrested by Jack for breaking and entering. Alana's promise to delete the footage and get her staff to pretend this incident never happened and keep it from Jack wasn't selfless, but luckily it works out in their favor.

"If Jack finds out about this, I get removed from here and I lose my family's safety net. You of all people should understand that I cannot let that happen." She had said in a very hushed tone while Abigail was in the car and out of earshot. *"I was under orders to keep this a secret, even though I would have preferred to throw her survival in his face."*

"Cat's outta the bag, now, Alana." He had answered.

"I can persuade Hannibal to keep this silent too."

Will did doubt that, but at least it would buy him some time.

Time to do... *what* exactly? He doesn't know. Everything is so splintered and fragile right now, and Abigail has squished herself into the furthest corner of the passenger seat, as far from Will as she can be in a small car. He has no fucking idea what *that* means, but he isn't sure he wants to find out.

"Am I going to be arrested?" Abigail asks timidly.

"No," Will replies roughly. "Alana is going to keep everything from Jack for her own safety, and by extension, yours. You got away with it." The last part sounds acidic, but Will can't really help it. In his mind, he replays the security footage from the hospital and sees their hands touching and hears Hannibal's voice spitting lies into her ear. Most of all, he sees Abigail falling for it, *wanting* it, and it hurts.

Abigail swallows audibly in the quiet car. "You don't seem to be happy about that."

The fear in her voice makes some of the anger pause, and he lets out a sigh. "Obviously, I don't want you to go to prison, Abigail." He answers.

"Are you sure about that?" She asks crisply.

That hurts too. She doesn't trust him. It probably shows on his face when he turns to look at her, but she doesn't see it because she's looking at her lap. "What did he do to you?"

"You saw everything on the tape. You heard the whole conversation. He talked about teacups and reversing time, and how he wished that he could undo what he did to me, or... what he thought he did."

“Because it drove me away from him.” Will bites back, and he hates the words even as they come out. “It was only ever about playing with me, Abi, you were collateral.”

Her breath catches and it puts another crack in his mask. He doesn’t want to hurt her, he really doesn’t, but he needs her to understand. Hannibal is always playing a game, and if you stand too close, you get burned.

“I don’t believe that.” She replies, bold and defiant.

Part of him loves her for it. Abigail is full of her own fire and she makes him question everything. When he conjured her on his journey to Italy, she was the voice of the thoughts he couldn’t bear to voice. *He misses us. He’s playing with us.* The living, breathing, thriving version is just the same, and that’s what terrifies him.

He has to stop this. If it ruins everything he has with Abigail, it will destroy him, but he could survive knowing she was safe.

He pulls over quickly, parking the car on the side of the road and throwing the hazards on for good measure. Abigail looks around a bit frantically. “What are you doing?”

Will pulls his phone out and pulls up a search engine. He doesn’t answer.

“Dad, what... what are you doing?” She tries again, sounding afraid.

“Putting you on the first plane back to Maine.” He clicks the link to the airline and hopes there’s one for tonight.

“What?”

He hums an affirmative. “You are going home.”

There’s a pause, and Will doesn’t have to see her face to know that she’s glaring at him. “No, I am not!”

“I am *not* asking.”

“What if Dr. Bloom doesn’t keep her promise? Agent Crawford will have questions. He wouldn’t let you send me home.” She argues, crossing her arms over her chest.

Will lets out an angry laugh. “I would like to see anyone try and stop me right now.” He actually would. He can feel violence squirming beneath his knuckles, pressing up at the scars that Randall Tier’s skull left behind. It’s powerful, terrifying, and it’s enough to keep him going along with his plan.

“I’ll just come back.” She states very matter-of-factly. “You send me home, I’ll get on another plane.”

“*Why?*” He yells, making her flinch with the sudden volume. “Why do you want to be here so badly?”

Abigail fixes him with tear-filled, steely eyes. “You *know* why.”

“For *fuck*’s sake, Abigail—”

“*I deserved to know why!*” She cuts him off sharply. A tear falls down her cheek and Will feels cold knowing that he’s the reason for them. She wipes it away angrily and catches her breath. “You would never have let me see him. Talk to him. Ask him what was so wrong with me that he had to do what he did. You would have never let me go to him, and I needed to. I deserved to know the truth.”

He grits his teeth but tries to keep his voice level. “I’ve told you the truth about him, but you won’t listen.”

“Because it *isn’t* the truth! Three years, Dad, we spoke about him once. *Once!* When we had a million years’ worth of things to say!”

Will remembers that conversation. It was one of their very early days, back when they were still learning to navigate each other, but Will told her the whole story. What they had been doing before Hannibal left, what happened in Florence and where the scar on his forehead came from, how he rejected Hannibal and how Hannibal wouldn’t allow it. Abigail, in turn, had told him about the time spent between Hannibal’s basement and a safe house near the cliffs where he kept her hidden. There was a lot to say then; Will was still very angry at the time and said he wanted to let Hannibal go completely. He never wanted to think about him, and he wanted him to stay waiting in the BSHCI for someone that would never come.

Abigail, at the time, had agreed.

He lets out a sad, bitter chuckle. “Alright then. What else do you have to say, Abigail? What else aren’t you telling me?”

“Like you said. I told you the truth, but you didn’t want to listen.”

And there it is. Abigail’s truth. What she really, really wants.

Nausea sours his throat, making it difficult to find the words. When he finally does speak, it doesn’t even sound like his own voice. “So when you told me that this life was enough for you, you weren’t telling me the truth.” It isn’t a question; he knows this is the case.

“You weren’t telling *me* the truth when you said it in the first place.” She argues, turning her body in the seat to face him more. He can’t bring himself to look at her. “Dad, what we have with Molly and Walter, if that’s what you really wanted, you would have sought it out a long time before all of this.”

Will feels his heart drop, and he builds the walls around it even higher. “After the hell that I went through because of Hannibal Lecter, I changed my mind.” He snaps.

Abigail narrows her eyes disapprovingly. “No, you didn’t. I can see it in your eyes all the time, even at home. Especially at home, actually. You’re a good actor, but all you’re doing is tapping into her feelings to cope with the fact that you’re miserable.”

Christ, don't pull your punches, kid.

“You look lost, like... like you've walked into a room and forgotten why, but it's every single room, Dad. You know you don't belong there because you're not like them, and neither am I. We've both taken lives, and we felt good when we did it. You killed Sean McCoy and then we ate him because he was *nothing*, and afterward we felt powerful. Today, I broke into a psychiatric hospital and no one noticed until you walked through the door. Fuck's sake, Dad, I stabbed the Great Red Dragon instead of running away!” She lets out a bitter, dead-sounding scoff. “This isn't Molly Foster's life.”

Will's heart is thrashing and the cold, aching pit in his stomach is growing larger. It's like there's a black hole inside of him, slowly consuming everything that makes Will *Will*, and it won't be satisfied until it's done.

This isn't Molly Foster's life.

This isn't Abigail Graham's life.

And... it isn't mine either.

All of Will's anger dissipates. Actually, it feels like everything has dissipated. He doesn't feel like himself. He doesn't really feel like anyone.

“Why did you encourage me to get involved with her if you knew all of this already?” He hears himself asking. His own voice sounds flat and emotionless, but it's not wavering anymore.

Abigail bites at her bottom lip, worrying the raw skin through her teeth. “I wanted you to be happy. For a while, I... I thought maybe you were, but then I realized that you really weren't, and I didn't know how to tell you. Was afraid to.”

“Why?”

“Because you wouldn't have listened to me, Dad. Not back then.”

Well. He can't really argue with that. He wouldn't have. He remembers how he was during the first few weeks after Hannibal was arrested; drunk every night, curling up with the blanket that still held Hannibal's scent and breathing it in for hours just to fucking *feel* something that wasn't bone-crushing loneliness and regret. Sometimes he cried, silent and stoic until he couldn't keep it in anymore and he started bawling. Come morning, he would awaken with a hangover and drown in his self-loathing until he told himself off and vowed to get his shit together. Then night would fall, and the pattern would repeat.

It got easier when Abigail showed up. For a while, he was just too happy that the universe gave her back to him that he didn't process the devastating truths lurking around his skull. Will had been given a second chance to be a father, *her* father, and he was determined to be the best he could be for her. He needed to be after how many times he failed her, and because she deserved it. Fucking hell did she deserve it.

The tipping point was killing McCoy. He's brave enough to admit that now. How had he possibly thought that *anything* could be the same after that? The night he took a life to save protect his daughter, ripped him apart and served him at the dinner table. All that was missing was a certain cannibalistic psychiatrist.

You're always what's missing, aren't you? Before I met you, after I met you. I wanted you even when I didn't want you. I couldn't live with what you were turning me into, but you were turning me into the most honest and brutal version of myself all along.

I said I would protect her from myself if I had to, and you said you believed that that was what I believed. But we weren't talking about the same thing. You knew without being told that I wasn't being honest with her or myself. You always know the truth even if I can't say it. I hate that but I crave it at the same time.

You didn't take her from me, in the end. She's still here, alive, even if you didn't mean it. I can hate you only for what you failed to do.

You tried to kill me, and there is a very large part of me that is afraid of you.

But you're frightened of me too, aren't you?

I want to tell you all of this in person but I can't. I want to deny these thoughts but I can't.

I want to deny that I need you, but I can't.

Will rubs tiredly at his eyes, and when he pulls his hand away, his knuckles are wet. He turns to see Abigail in a similar state, eyes damp, sad, and raw, but it no longer feels like they're walking on a tightrope. Nothing is fixed, but... the pieces are there.

Abigail has made him be truthful about his feelings for the first time, even if he can't really voice them yet. He owes her a truth of his own.

"I felt it," He murmurs. "How much you missed him. How much you..." The words *loved him* die on Will's tongue. He can't say that even to himself yet. He swallows hard and forces himself to speak. "I just... I thought it was me. I thought what I felt was... my own feelings."

"It was a dirty secret." Abigail says, and a tiny spark of warmth lights in his heart. *I can always trust you to say what I can't.* "You convinced yourself that you weren't feeling it from me because if you acknowledged it, that made it real. Keep it to yourself, it doesn't exist. If you keep it to yourself, you can protect me."

He's too overcome, too tired to answer, so he just turns his gaze out the window and nods.

Abigail smiles, a tiny, heartbreaking little smile, but it's still something. "I felt the same, Dad. We both miss him. It's the same grief. You don't have to know if it's mine or yours, you just have to know that it hurts."

Will doesn't nod this time but knows it's true nonetheless.

“Dad?”

Her voice suddenly sounds so small that it breaks through enough of the clouds in his head and he turns to look at her again. Abigail isn't looking at him anymore, but he can see enough of her face to know that she's afraid to look up. “Yes?” He encourages her gently.

Abigail's eyes dart up to his for a moment, but she quickly drops them. “There's something else. I knew you wouldn't listen if I told you any of this before, but I... I also didn't tell you because I wanted to stay with you, and I was afraid if I told you how I really felt that you wouldn't...” She hesitates, opening her mouth to say something before quickly closing it again.

Will is terrified of what she's about to say, but he's going to listen. No matter what it is. “It's okay, you can tell me.” He tells her gently.

“I was afraid you would resent me. And that you'd make me leave.”

It feels like the Earth has fallen out from under Will's feet. There's a plummeting sensation that starts from his skull and goes all the way down to his heart and into his stomach. He feels almost sick, but he moves just as she starts sobbing, wrapping his arms around her small, shaking frame and rubbing her back in calming circles.

“I would never do that to you, sweetheart. I would *never*.” She sobs heavier at that, her hand coming up to clutch at his coat despite the awkward angle. Will just shushes her gently and presses his lips to the top of her head. “You should never have felt like that, and I'm so, so fucking sorry that I ever put that thought in your head. You can always come to me, Abi, *always*.”

She nods against his shoulder and he just holds her tight. “I love you, Dad. I'm sorry. I love you.”

“I'm sorry too, baby.” Will answers as a few tears of his own escape. “I have always loved you. I will always love you.”

They should have done this ages ago, this fucking talk, but if ever there were a time for it, it was now. Things aren't fixed, and Will has no fucking idea what to do with this, but he feels clearer than he has in a long, long time. Lighter. Less burdened with his secret now that he knows it's mutual.

They stay that way for a few minutes, just holding onto one another until they both stop shaking and the tears have turned to sniffles. When they finally break apart, Will takes another second to press a kiss to her forehead, which earns him the first genuine smile of the day.

“You are hell on my blood pressure, child, d'you know that?” He says fondly, his accent thickening the words. “My brave girl.”

She laughs a little breathlessly and just hugs him again. “What are we going to do about... all of this?” She asks.

Will sighs and squeezes her a little tighter. "I don't know yet. But, I'll figure something out." He pushes her back, looking into her eyes and anchoring his hands on her shoulders. "Trust me? Abi?"

His daughter nods. "Always."

God, he loves her.

Much later, after takeout and the necessary call to Alana to confirm that everything was okay and that they weren't going to get swarmed by Jack and Co at three in the morning, they're finally getting ready for bed. Abi is lounging on her bed on the opposite wall with her nose buried in a book, her hair wet from her shower, and a warm cup of shitty motel tea in her palm. Will is knelt on the ground putting things in his suitcase when he notices his little tool kit lying open half under the bed. There is only one thing missing; one of his larger screwdrivers.

His stomach flips. *Uh oh.* "Abi?" His voice sounds almost comically high-pitched.

"Hm?"

"Did you leave my screwdriver at the hospital?"

She turns and gives him a look that says *do I look that irresponsible?* "No, it's in the car."

Will lets out the breath he was holding. "Thank fuck."

"I hid it in my boot when I got in the vent. You couldn't even see it because the scrubs were kinda big." She says this so casually, like it's just another day, and the most shit-eating grin stretches across her face. "Good right?"

He laughs out of relief or just at the sheer ridiculousness of their lives and reaches up to steal her mug of tea from her hand. She protests with a soft, annoyed "*hey!*" but doesn't try to stop him. "I would be lying if I said I wasn't a little impressed. Anything else happen today that I should know about?" He teases as he moves to take a sip.

Abi thinks for a second, then gets wide eyed. "Actually, when I was walking in the actual hospital, a bunch of guards were bringing a prisoner by me and I had to hide behind a hospital bed so they didn't see me."

Will is suddenly very frozen and the teasing mood is gone. He tries to take a deep breath to calm his nerves. Abigail is fine, she's safe, and Alana has a very loyal staff. They're fine.

"He was intense though, the prisoner, I mean." She continues. "He did see me, but he didn't say anything."

"The prisoner saw you?"

“He won’t snitch on me. He was quiet when I asked him to be and he barely reacted when he saw me. It was eerie, but I’m pretty sure we’re okay.” Then, as an afterthought, she says; “And no offense, but who would believe him if he said he saw Abigail Graham hiding in the BSCHI if the rest of the staff is pretending it never happened?”

Will opens his mouth to protest but quickly closes it. She has a point, or he’s just too exhausted to argue. “Let’s hope you’re right.” He mumbles into the mug of tea.

That night, Will dreams of the woods by his old house in Wolf Trap. He looks out on the black silhouettes of trees that are lightly dusted in snow, to the full moon in the sky above. He hears noises behind him and he whips around, expecting to see the Dragon.

Instead he sees his stag and the young fawn resting on the forest floor side by side. Standing behind them, looming in a way that is both threatening and protective all at once, is the wendigo.

And from somewhere behind his head, ghosting just over his shoulder to whisper in his ear and send chills down his spine, comes Hannibal’s voice.

“Don’t you crave change, Will?”

He wakes up in a cold sweat with a sore heart and the word *yes* on the tip of his tongue.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I am SO sorry this has taken me so long, but I ended up scrapping the original ending for this and doing something different, which took time to plan. Plus, the holidays are really hard for me and it was difficult to focus on big projects, but I hope that this was worth the wait, despite how short it is. It's short on purpose, I swear. More chapters are coming, and I promise, soon everyone will be reunited!

ALSO! Yes, I did change my username, so I'm so sorry to anyone who was confused!

Anyway, please enjoy! Love you all!
Canary

The sound of her father's cell phone vibrating across the surface of the bedside table is what wakes Abigail. It's early, still dark, she can tell that much, way too early for anybody to be calling.

"Dad." She grumbles into her pillow, tired and irritated.

"I got it." He croaks back, voice thick with sleep.

Abigail hums and pulls the covers over her head. *Back to sleep.*

"Hello?" She hears a muted voice on the other end of the line, then Will's sharp intake of breath. "He is? Jack, are you sure?"

Suddenly, Abigail's blood goes ice cold, and she feels instantly awake. She pushes the sheets back and glances bleary-eyed over at her father, who is sitting upright on the edge of his bed, disheveled, confused, and somewhere between angry and afraid. Her heart starts pounding. She gives him a concerned look, which he doesn't even acknowledge.

"Okay. Okay, Jack. I'll... I'll be there. Give me a little while." Will sounds resigned and wary, exhausted in a way that unsettles her right to her core. Then, he hangs up and fiddles with the phone in his hands. He doesn't look up.

Abigail sits up to mirror him. "Dad, what's happened?"

"The Red Dragon killed himself."

Whatever she expected him to say, it certainly wasn't that. It sounds wrong. Abigail thinks back to the monster who stalked her, and her stepmother and brother through the night. He was impressive, large, and sadistic to a fault. He wanted people to tremble before him with

awe while he transformed them. Suicide fits him like an off-the-rack suit. She narrows her eyes, and when Will meets them, she can tell that he's thinking the same thing. "It doesn't make sense." She says.

Will sighs and runs a hand over his face. "No, it doesn't."

"He's not done yet. He's come so far, he's not afraid of getting caught." She argues, even though she's not sure why, considering her Dad knows it all. "The FBI has his name, they've seen his face, *hell*, Dad, you met him in the art gallery! He has plans. He wouldn't just... off himself."

"I agree with you." He doesn't sound happy about it. "Abigail, I want you to do something for me." He adds after a few very tense seconds of silence.

"Anything."

"Take my card. I want you to get out of the motel for the day."

Once again, Abigail feels thrown. "And... do what?"

Will reaches out and takes her hands in his, squeezing them tight. He's worried. "Go to the hospital and be with Molly and Walter. Do not come back here until I call you and tell you that it's safe."

Her first instinct is to argue that that would mean leaving him alone, but the undercurrent of energy in his words makes her pause. "You think he's going to come after you?"

"I don't know. He might. If he's alive, if he thinks Hannibal betrayed him, he may come for me instead."

"And you're going to let him?"

"If I can talk to him, I can manipulate him into keeping me alive. If he wants revenge on Hannibal, he'll know the best person to assist him would also be me,"

Abigail turns the words over and over in her head in a desperate attempt to decipher the turning cogs of her father's brain. She wounded the Dragon on their first encounter, so he would kill her without a second thought, but Will has a point about Dolarhyde going after him to get to Hannibal. She knows he's right, she just doesn't *like it*.

"And then what?" She asks.

Will squeezes her hands, partially for reassurance, partially an apology. "I don't know. It depends on what the Dragon does."

"But, what if he kills you?"

"I'll kill him first." He answers, ice cold and deliberate.

Abigail believes him.

“You can go home again if there’s any point. Is there any point?”

“I like my life there.”

“It won’t be the same. You’ll see it’s not the same. The unspoken knowledge will live with you like unwanted company in the house.

“Molly and I want it to be the same.”

“Does Abigail?”

Will’s body seizes up at the mention of her. He doesn’t answer, knowing that at this point, Hannibal would see right through it, and right through him.

“When life becomes maddeningly polite...” Hannibal continues on, and Will doesn’t meet his eyes, knowing exactly what he’ll see. “Think about me. Think about me, Will. Don’t worry about me.”

Will approaches the glass, and places his hand against the barrier between them. He could slip his fingers into the opening as Abigail did, but he’s too stubborn to do so. He’s punishing Hannibal and Hannibal knows it, but at least it will be effective. “You turned yourself in so that I would always know where you were. But you’d only do that if I rejected you.”

Hannibal’s face doesn’t change, but Will can tell by the way he’s standing that the meaning has gotten under his skin.

“Goodbye.” Will drops his hand, leaving a trace of himself as fingerprints and dust, and forces himself to walk away.

Is Hannibal... in love with me?

“Will.”

Could he daily feel a stab of hunger for you, and find nourishment at the very sight of you?

“Was it good to see me?”

Yes.

“Good?”

But do you ache for him?

“No.”

It's a lie to both questions. He still walks away.

“Hannibal Lecter is who you need to change.” Will rasps, his voice low and urgent.

Across from him, the Dragon offers him an unsettling grin. “I want to meet Lecter. How would I manage that?”

And Will doesn’t smile, but the urge is there. *All things go according to plan.*

Will is still cleaning the blood and sweat from his face when the motel door opens and slams against the opposite wall.

“Dad?” Comes Abigail’s frantic voice.

He slips out of the bathroom just in time to have his daughter’s weight slammed into him. He bites back the grunt of pain from where her arms brush the forming bruises on his torso, but he encases her against his chest and squeezes her tight, suddenly lightheaded with relief that his plan worked. Sending her to the hospital for the day kept her safe.

“Oh God, are you okay?” She mumbles against his shoulder. “Did he hurt you?”

“Only a little.” He won’t lie to her. “I was right. He wants to kill Hannibal.”

Abigail pulls away just enough to scrutinize his face. “Are you... are you going to let him?” Her voice sounds so small and young like she had in the car during their fight.

It is a possibility, that much is certain. He could kill Hannibal after they escape for real and kill Dolarhyde; it’s what Jack is going to want him to do. The fake-escape, regardless of how successful the capture of Dolarhyde is, would result in Hannibal’s death. The real escape’s outcome depends on Hannibal’s survival and his cooperation with Will’s plan.

He doesn’t need to say it out loud, but he does anyway just for Abigail. “No. Hannibal and I are going to kill him.” She still looks lost, so Will gestures toward the bed, and they both move to sit down. “The Dragon and I came up with a plan...”

He proceeds to explain everything, leaving out no details. He tells her about how the Dragon ambushed him, the way he spoke, and what he said, and then he tells her the plan. The whole time, his daughter listens and absorbs every word and never once interrupts, even with how frightened she clearly is. The plan is incredibly risky, but it is the only way.

Once he finishes his tale, Abigail takes a deep, shuddering breath. “And then what? I mean... if you escape with him, what happens to me? Will you... will you come back for me?”

Will places both hands on her shoulders and forces her to look at him. There are tears in her eyes, and he knows what’s going through her head without having to ask.

If you go back to him, you won’t come back. He’s too important.

You love him, Dad. You’ve always loved him, and that’s why you can’t let him go. That’s why you waited until Molly was asleep to read his letter, that’s why you burned it right afterwards,

to leave no evidence when you inevitably can't resist him and never come home again.

His daughter is too smart for her own good. She called it from the beginning, knew that if he went to Hannibal, no matter what he did, it wouldn't be enough for Will to let him go. They can never go back to Molly and Walter because while their lives intertwined, they were never conjoined. Will and Abigail Graham do not belong there any more than Hannibal belongs in a cage.

"Abigail," Will says slowly, keeping his voice soft. "Do you trust me?"

"Yes," She replies instantly, looking affronted by the question. "Of course, I do, how could you even—"

"*Abi.*" He shakes his head and tries to bury his anxiety. He needs her to listen. "There is only one way to make this work, and I need you to be very, very brave for me, okay? Do you trust me to do whatever is necessary to keep us safe?"

"Yes."

"And you will listen to me and follow my instructions?"

"*Yes, Dad.*"

"Even if you're afraid, or don't like the plan?"

There is the briefest pause, no hesitation, just fear, but Abigail grits her teeth and nods. "Yes. I trust you. I'll listen. I'll... I'll do whatever you ask. I promise."

Satisfied, Will pulls her into a hug and kisses her forehead. "My brave girl. I love you. You know that, right?"

She nods. "I love you, Dad."

Will lets out a shaky breath and releases her, satisfied by her answers. He gets to his feet, aware of Abigail curiously watching his every step as he grabs his wallet off of the bedside table and opens it up.

Hannibal's letter was not the only secret correspondence Will Graham received in the last few years. Not even Abigail knows about this one; he kept it safe and hidden behind photos and credit cards, always hidden, for the better part of two years since its' arrival. It came in a single white envelope with no return address, but he knew who the sender was. He couldn't bring himself to throw it out, convinced himself it could be useful, that he was waiting for a reason to pass the information onto Jack. He never did. (Never could.)

From behind his favorite photo of Abigail, Will retrieves the small, folded-up piece of stationery that has withered at the creases from being pressed into his wallet after all this time. He holds it between his trembling fingers. It burns his skin. He unfolds it, skimming the words written on it even though he knows it by heart:

For when you are tired of standing still.

“What is that?” Abigail asks him cautiously.

Will sighs shakily and dials the phone number written underneath. “Help.” He replies, then holds the phone to his ear.

It rings once, twice, three times, and then clicks.

“Hello, Will.”

“How did you know it was me?”

“I’ve been waiting to hear from you. I knew I only had to wait.”

Will holds back the spiteful reply burning on his tongue. “I need your help, Chiyoh.”

“I am listening.”

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

What the fuck is this? Two updates in two days after a month of radio silence? You bet your ass. <3

“Hannibal would be the best bait.”

“Why in God’s name would anyone want to meet Hannibal Lecter?”

“To kill him, Jack. The Dragon could absorb him that way, engulf him, become more than he is.”

“You sound pretty sure.”

Will shuffles his feet, mimicking restlessness that he doesn’t quite feel. “I’m not sure. Who’s sure? I’m not even sure Hannibal would draw the Dragon, I just say that it’s our best shot.”

Jack glances back at Arnold Lang’s crispy corpse on the morgue table through the glass, then turns back to Will. “Set him up how?”

Smiling internally, Will lays out the plan for Jack who watches him with slightly bewildered, uncomprehending eyes that turn hard with understanding once he’s done. He explains his part in it, how he will be in the middle of the action, ready to kill the Dragon (if necessary), and ready to kill Hannibal (that is the part that wins Jack over in the end, much to Will’s delight).

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Jack asks.

Will nods. He’s never been more sure of anything, even though he and Jack are talking about two different things. “I want to go home. I want this to be over. I want Hannibal gone, I want the Dragon gone. This is our best option.”

Jack sighs. “Alright then. I’ll set it up.”

Just as he’s talking, Will feels his phone begin to vibrate in his pocket. A sharp feeling of anticipation rockets through his body, and he has to force himself to remain very, very calm. He already knows who it is, and when he slides it out and peeks at the contact name, he utters a quick apology to Jack. “I have to take this.”

“Go ahead.”

Will answers the call and holds the phone to his ear. “Hi, Kate,” He says monotonously.

Molly's sister has never really liked him, though she's never been anything but polite and distant. A perfect diversion. *"Will, hey, I'm at the airport, but Abigail isn't here."*

Will narrows his eyes, looking every bit like the parent who is on the verge of worry. "What do you mean?" He asks sharply, making Jack turn to look at him in concern.

"I asked, they said that everyone that was on the plane got off, and I keep calling her but her phone keeps going to voicemail. She isn't here, Will, what do I do?"

Will allows himself to look slightly panicked, wide-eyed, and chest heaving and locks eyes with Jack, who suddenly is in FBI mode. "Keep trying, Kate. Keep calling her, I'm going to do the same. Get them to call her on the PA system if you have to."

Kate agrees they exchange a quick goodbye, and Will lets the call drop while he stares at the screen blankly.

"Will." Jack urges, putting himself directly into his eye line. "Will, what's going on?"

"Something's wrong," He rasps, sounding every bit as freaked out as any parent would be. "I bought a plane ticket for Abigail, she was supposed to stay with Molly's sister and her husband in Florida but she... she isn't there."

Jack's eyes narrow suspiciously, just as Will assumed they would. "Well, it wouldn't be the first time Abigail has gone off on her own."

"No. No, Jack, after the Dragon tried to..." He swallows down the bile that rises in his throat (this reaction he doesn't need to fake—the idea of what Dolarhyde would have done to her still horrifies him). "She was scared. She wouldn't do this. Something is *wrong*."

"Agent Crawford?"

Then, as if the universe is finally, *finally* on his side, a young female agent, one Will recognizes from his lecture days who is part of the task force to catch Dolarhyde, comes speed-walking down the hall toward them wearing a very grim expression. Her eyes fix on Will for just a second too long, icy and anxious about her current mission.

Jack and Will both turn to her, and though Will already knows what she's about to say, to anyone else, he looks checked out and half-frantic.

"This better be important, Wilson." Jack barks at her.

Agent Wilson flounders for a moment, turning her gaze to Will for a second time. "Local PD called us. You need to see this. It's... sir, it's bad. Mr. Graham..."

The tone of her voice is very telling, and internally, Will smiles triumphantly. Everything is falling into place.

The front end of the cab is smashed from the impact it made against the light post. The cab driver is still slumped over against the wheel that's covered in his blood. Brain matter from the bullet through the side of his head is splattered against the dashboard, the seat, and the opposite window. He was dead instantly, and once again, Will is rendered both shocked and impressed by Chiyoh's aim. Her resourcefulness too; he knows the bullet was fired from a gun that is identical to the one the Dragon uses. If he wasn't trying to look so broken, he would be smiling.

The back drivers-side door has been left ajar, but there is a spot of blood on the window from where Abigail's head must have hit when they crashed. Her cellphone, now complete with a cracked screen, lies on the seat, lighting up with missed calls and texts. Her backpack is still on the floor of the car, unopened and abandoned. There's a gouge from her nails in the driver's headrest, and the part itself is bent like she grabbed onto it for dear life while her attacker ripped her from the vehicle. *My brave, smart girl.*

Will stands by the cab, pale and trembling like he could keel over any second. His lashes are damp with tears that he won't shed, but everyone can see his reaction. They're all occasionally glancing up at him with pity and horror, preemptively apologizing for his loss that they know is coming. Jack is among them. Jack believes.

"Will," The man himself murmurs gently like he's speaking to a wild animal, but the rage is unmistakable. "Is it him? Is it... did Francis Dolarhyde do this?"

Mutely, too overwrought to speak yet, Will nods. He swallows hard and squeezes his eyes shut, covering his face with both hands, and allows himself to sink to the floor in a crouch. Anywhere else, he would be mortified to do this, but he plays the part well; he breathes in sharply, catching on a sob that wants to escape and he wraps his arms around his torso. (No one sees his fingers digging into his ribs with enough force to hurt—all they see are the tears that fall.)

Jack crouches down to his level and places an awkward, comforting hand on his back. He doesn't know what to say.

"She attacked him," Will croaks around the emotions in his chest. "At the house, the Dragon found her and Abigail wounded him. He's got her, Jack." His voice breaks, but instead of just looking sad and tragic, Will releases a guttural, enraged sound and reels back, then drives his fist into the ground. *"Fuck!"*

Eyes from every direction are on him and he feels sympathy from every one of them. They're not judging his reaction, and neither is Jack. He rubs soothing circles into Will's spine, bringing his other hand up to take Will's other hand which is now bleeding to prevent him from doing it again. "I'll contact Secret Service. Tell them to expedite. In the meantime, I'll put an ATL on your daughter."

"He'll kill her in front of me." He replies brokenly. "He'll want me to watch."

"I won't let that happen, and neither will you."

Will nods and visibly tries to compose himself. Of course, no one would blame him for having a breakdown, but they will also see a man who is strengthening his resolve, ready to fight to the death to protect his child, something he cannot be a broken mess for. “No,” He growls out. “No, I won’t.”

“I’d pack my bags if I were you, Bedelia. Meat’s back on the menu.”

“You righteous, reckless, *twitchy* little man. He might as well cut all of our throats and be done with it.”

“Ready or not, here he comes.”

Just as he’s about to leave the office, he hears Bedelia laugh almost bitterly to herself. “Where does Abigail Hobbs fit into all of this?” She demands.

A small, innocent smile pulls at Will’s lips, masking the hidden snarl. Bedelia’s blatant refusal to acknowledge Abigail as *his* has been consistent throughout their sessions, and it is something that will not go unpunished. “Like father, like daughter.” He answers, then leaves the room, knowing that the next time he and Bedelia see one another, it will be the final time.

“It sounds weak to you, even as you say it.” Hannibal notes. *He’s onto you.*

“Secret Service has a set-up they’ve never used. They’ll let us have it.” He adds, then: “You’re our best shot, Hannibal.”

Hannibal scrutinizes his face like he’s considering the prospect, but Will can see right through him. He’s waiting to hear what else Will has to say, waiting for the *pretty please* he wanted, but from the moment Will walked in, looking very much like his world has shattered underneath a tough, confident facade, Hannibal has figured out that there is more to this story. Their connection has always made it easy for them to communicate between the lines, having one conversation while everyone else around them believes them to be speaking of something else entirely. It’s a feeling that thrills him and frightens him, but Will has come to realize what that feeling really is.

But, there will be time for that later.

Will breaks eye contact for a moment and releases a shaky breath. He works the emotion into his voice again, thick and desperate and cold, and says: “Hannibal, he has Abigail.”

The room is very still for a moment. Of course, the orderlies may remember Abigail sneaking through the vents, but neither of them will say a word thanks to Alana. Jack believes that Hannibal learned of Abigail’s survival after the Dragon tried to kill her at the house, so Hannibal doesn’t pretend to look shocked. He stares blankly into Will’s eyes, and the only thing that betrays him is the elated spark that flashes through deep maroon.

See the gift I’m giving you, Will silently pleads. *See what I’m doing for us.*

“Am I a trade?” Hannibal questions, sounding bored. *I do. I see it. I see you.*

“If that’s what it comes down to.”

“How convenient.” He sighs, long-suffering and dramatic.

Will steps forward into his space and lowers his voice to a broken whisper. “*Please.* I need you, Hannibal. Just... please.”

The smile that stretches across his is sinister, pleased, and genuine. Will knows he’s been heard.

Will’s ears are still ringing while Hannibal crawls out of the open back doors of the prison van. He’s definitely going to have a bruise on his shoulder from the way he fell, but it’s irrelevant. He forces himself to crawl forward.

Hannibal is removing his cut bindings and mask and Will just stares at his back. God, they did it. They actually did it. Hannibal is free.

“Well, he’s not going to kill us here.” Hannibal quips pleasantly, already striding away.

“What are you doing?” Will grunts as he climbs from the van. *Fuck*, his body hurts.

Hannibal throws a smile over his shoulder as he approaches the cop car. “You know, Will, you worry too much. You would be much more comfortable if you just relaxed with yourself.”

Will watches with a confused, besotted expression while Hannibal (who doesn’t look at all like he just went through a gnarly car crash) drags the dead cop from the vehicle and drops them like trash on the side of the road. He almost laughs when Hannibal swings the car around and pushes the other one out of the car to slump on the pavement. This is ridiculous. *Hannibal* is ridiculous.

Hannibal leans over and grins at him. “Going my way?”

Where else would I go?

Will steps over the corpse and crawls into the passenger seat. His heart is pounding and his stomach is in knots, but he can’t shake the feeling of joy that is making his fingers tingle. They aren’t safe, not yet, but his plan worked. It fucking worked.

They begin their drive down the long, empty road, and for a while, neither of them says anything. It isn’t until they’re about a mile away from the crash that Hannibal finally glances over at him for a brief second before turning back to the road. “Where is Abigail, Will?” He asks quietly.

“She’s safe. She’s with Chiyoh.” He answers. “I don’t know where they are, but they’re close by. Hiding. They will not be joining us tonight.”

Hannibal grins, looking amused and impressed. “Faked her kidnapping?”

“I did.”

“What a cunning boy you are.” This time when he says it, it’s full of warmth, and it makes Will’s heart ache. What a difference these last few weeks have made on his mind. Hell, even the last few *days*.

Everything has happened so fast, he feels like he should have whiplash. Every minute since his conversation with Abigail after she broke into the hospital, Will has been hard at work to figure out his feelings, knowing that once he decided, there would be no going back. Will knows what this means for him, for Hannibal, for his... *their* daughter (she is, whether Will wants to believe it or not). He isn’t afraid of it anymore. Isn’t afraid of *himself* anymore.

Will looks over at Hannibal, who isn’t looking at him, and for the very first time, he lets himself say the one thing he promised he never would. He doesn’t say it out loud, isn’t quite brave enough yet, but admitting it to himself is enough. He’s held back the thought for so long, twisted it, perverted it, disguised it as anything but what it really was so that he couldn’t drown, but not anymore. Never again.

Because regardless of if it’s a good thing or not, regardless of if it means Will Graham is just as wrong as the world believes, nothing changes the fact that Will loves this man beyond reason, and would do anything for him. Die for him, kill for him, anything in the whole fucking world if it meant Hannibal would stay by his side always. They were always supposed to be together. From the very beginning. Now they are, and they will be for as long as there is life still flowing through their veins.

Carefully, Will reaches over the center console, takes Hannibal’s hand from the steering wheel, and laces their fingers together. Hannibal glances down at their conjoined hands in surprise, then turns his gaze to Will. He isn’t looking at the road except for a brief flicker of his eyes. He’s staring directly into Will’s, stunned, hopeful, and aching.

“Whatever happens tonight...” Will squeezes his hand. “Stay with me. Don’t leave without me.”

Hannibal’s breath catches, and as if he’s too overcome to keep looking, he turns back to the road. Will can see tears shining in his eyes, and he squeezes one more time. Hannibal lifts their hands and presses a gentle kiss to Will’s knuckles. “*Never.*”

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Hiya! Sorry this has taken so long, I've been really sick and really busy, but HERE WE ARE. Finally, finally, FINALLY our boys are together!!!

Trust me, this fic is not done. I have a few more chapters planned out and I hope you guys enjoy. I hope you continue to stick around for the ending. <3

The house on the cliffs overlooking the ocean. The very one where Hannibal hid Abigail during those long months. Will can hardly believe it. The air inside smells stale, but they open the patio doors and it doesn't take long for the scent of pine and seawater to take over the old air. The place looks exactly as Abigail described, modern yet elegant, decorated sparsely but still to Hannibal's eccentric taste.

God. Hannibal.

Another thing that Will can't believe. It worked. Everything worked.

Will can't help but watch his companion out of the corner of his eye while they strip the dust-coated sheets from the furniture. Hannibal absolutely knows that Will is looking at him, but he chooses not to comment on it. Actually, their conversation on the cliff just moments ago was the first time they had spoken since Will took his hand in the car and asked him to stay.

He still feels the burning imprint of Hannibal's lips on his hand.

He wants to feel more.

It should be awful, shouldn't it? How much he just wants to forget that the Dragon is coming, forget that there is a chance, however so small, that one or both of them could die tonight. How much he wants to forget about the woman and child he left in a hospital under FBI surveillance, never to return to them again.

Will should feel guilty. He should feel awful about Molly. His Molly, his *wife*. The woman he got down on one knee for, the woman he married, loved and vowed to stay with. He should feel guilty that the last time they had sex, the night before Will departed for Virginia when Molly's soft, roaming hands gripped his hair and stroked his cock, his thoughts were all clouded with images of honey-blood eyes, toned, golden skin over strong muscle, and a raspy, accented voice in his ear no matter how much he wanted to focus on his wife.

He should absolutely feel guilty that despite the ring burning his hand, the very hand that Hannibal *kissed*, despite that reminder, that anchor to his wife, all Will wants to do now is let Hannibal take him to bed. He wants that more than anything.

They could die tonight. They could die here when the Dragon comes, and Will doesn't want to waste what potential time they have left. No. This night must mean more than all of the others, because Will has finally, *finally* made his decision. The *right* decision. And it's standing just mere feet from him, still clad in a prison jumpsuit and a serene little smile.

"We should eat." Hannibal says, breaking Will from his trance. "We will need to preserve our strength."

For a very brief second, Will wonders if Hannibal can sense the arousal, that ancient, waking dark pit of desire that has thrummed through his veins, ignored and unnamed for so many years. *He has to know, doesn't he?*

Hannibal's expression is neutral and pleasant, no trace of knowing. *Of feeling.*

Perhaps he doesn't know. Maybe he just hopes.

"No one's been here in years," Will says, chest painfully tight for some reason. "I doubt whatever, or *whomever* you have in the fridge will be good anymore."

"Indeed not." He answers with a smirk. "However, there may still be some non-perishables in the cupboards. Are you hungry at all?"

"No, not really."

Admittedly, he is, but Will's hunger cannot be satisfied by food.

"Nor am I. Perhaps later." Hannibal finishes folding the dust cover in a meticulous bundle and places it on the stack with the rest, then straightens himself up and faces Will.

He looks beautiful. Genuinely beautiful. The sun's rays make the blonde in his hair look dark and gold, and his eyes look impossibly warm, like liquid amber. He's no longer smirking but *smiling*, tender, longing, craving, *needing*, *loving*, *wanting*...

All too soon, however, that devastating, powerful stare turns away in the direction of the hall. "I would like to have a shower. There are extra clothes in the master bedroom, should you prefer to change."

"Alright." Will replies, throat suddenly dry.

Hannibal nods, holds his eyes for a moment longer, then turns away and disappears into one of the bedrooms, leaving the door open.

An invitation?

Once he hears the telltale signs of the shower turning on and the slide of the glass doors, Will lets out the breath that he's been holding for God knows how long. He has to brace himself on the counter, head hung low between his shoulders while he tries to remember how to breathe.

If the open door *is* an invitation, it would be rude to refuse it.

Fucking hell though. *Fantasizing* about having sex with Hannibal is very different than *actually* having sex with Hannibal, and Will is becoming increasingly aware that he is completely out of his depth. Not even just because Hannibal is a *man* either, albeit the first (and only) man that Will is going to sleep with. It's because he's *Hannibal*.

His executioner. His architect. His greatest weakness. His *literal* worst nightmare come to life; the monster under his bed, the devil in his ear, the beast that snarls and thrashes and screams, waking dark desires inside of Will's very essence, answering that echo with violence of his own. His partner, his passion, his... *God*, Hannibal is *everything*.

They've waited so long for this. Too long.

Hannibal has waited years. Before prison, before the kitchen bloodbath, before Randall Tier, encephalitis, and maybe even Abigail.

Will has been waiting too, even if he didn't know it.

They've been waiting long enough.

If the open door is an invitation, then Will is not going to keep Hannibal waiting any longer.

Will can't wait any longer.

He accepts the invitation with a thundering heart and his head held high.

The master bedroom is actually stunning. There is a beautiful view of the cliffs and the rolling ocean from the bed that is positioned against the wall. It, like the living and dining room, is not as decorated as Hannibal's bedroom at his old home but still has a certain familiar flare within the ivory walls. The bathroom is off to the side, and even without entering, Will can tell it's huge and grand like the rest of the place.

Hannibal is already in the shower; steam floats from the open bathroom door and heats the bedroom from the inside. *Of course, he likes scalding showers*. Though, it could also feel so warm because Will feels hot all of a sudden, overheated, and stretched thin. He's terrified if he's honest with himself, but he pushes on nonetheless.

Will keeps his eyes averted when he steps into the bathroom and closes the door behind him. Hannibal is looking at him through the milky glass, eyes boring holes into the tense lines of Will's shoulder blades. With shaking hands, Will strips out of his rumpled clothes, leaves them on a heap on the floor by the wall, and turns toward the counter. He knows Hannibal is still watching, curious, hopeful, and it makes Will feel braver than he had before. He doesn't meet Hannibal's eyes as he slides the wedding ring from his left finger and places it on the marble countertop with just enough force to make a sound. An impact. *A promise*.

Silently, Will looks at the ring and says goodbye. He apologizes to Molly for not being a better man, not being the *right* man for her. He hopes that she will find that man someday, but it was never going to be Will.

And with that, Will takes the plunge.

The water is delectably warm when he pulls the glass door open and steps inside. The shower is larger inside than it looks, marble like the rest of the bathroom, but Will can't pay attention to anything other than how Hannibal looks right now.

His lips are slightly parted like he has a million things to say but can't find the voice for any of them, but it's Hannibal's *eyes* that give away how cracked open he truly feels now. Glinting, sparkling with something that looks like worship and destruction all at the same time as if Will has gifted him a monument or temple. It's the type of yearning that is only spoken about in poetry and epic tales; something you read about and long for but never expect to find. If only the feelings of ordinary people were so profound.

For a moment, all they do is stare at each other. Will is unable to look away from his face. He's made it this far; they're standing together in the spacious shower, naked and vulnerable in front of one another for the first time (Will chooses to ignore the knowledge that Hannibal has stripped him many times for various reasons, just this once.)

Hannibal is... *God*, actually, he's quite stunning. He's broad and strong, aided by several years of training and moving corpses, though there is the slightest hint of softness around the middle from aging and being confined to a glass box for three years. His skin looks less golden due to the lack of sunlight in the hospital too but has done nothing to steal his striking features away. Hannibal is *stunning* like this. Has he always been so beautiful?

Then Will's eyes travel downward, and his mouth waters when he catches sight of Hannibal's cock resting half-hard and heavy between his legs. He's big enough now that he could very well split Will in half, and that particular thought sends heat pooling in his abdomen. *God*, he wants this. The desire that has been left to brew like wine in a barrel for the last few years has finally bubbled over. He wants this more than anything.

Hannibal moves first, grabbing the fresh bar of expensive soap from the shelf and lathering it in his hands. He keeps looking at Will out of the corner of his eye, clearly giving Will space to center himself first, but he stays on his side of the shower and cleans the feeling of prison from his skin. Will watches Hannibal's strong hands as they move up and down his wet body, enchanted.

Once he dubs himself sufficiently clean, he holds the bar of soap out to Will.

Instead of taking it, Will grabs his wrist and holds it tight.

Hannibal looks at him in surprise, and there's a barely containable fire behind that look as if Will's courage is more arousing than what they're clearly about to do. If it were anyone else other than Hannibal, Will would feel annoyed, but there's something infectious about that desire. Knowing that Will put it there...

Will takes the soap and places it down on the shelf, allowing himself to crowd into Hannibal's space to do so. There is still a wide trail of suds along Hannibal's chest that he aches to feel, so he does with a careful, feather-light touch across his strong pectoral muscles. Touching Hannibal is surreal; he's warm and solid and the intimacy between them is steadily becoming more intense the longer Hannibal allows Will this gift. And it is a gift. Will has felt

starved for touch for so long, something that Molly could never give him in the way he needed, simply because she's not Hannibal.

Minutes go by, the air grows heavy, and suddenly Will's hands are seized, causing him to look up with wide eyes. Hannibal looks more undone than Will has ever seen him; eyes nearly black, his chest heaving while he shivers under Will's palms. He needs this so much, but yet he's trying to stop Will, and Will doesn't— "Is this what you want, Will? Truly?"

Oh.

His voice is so soft, so hopeful, and pained that it doesn't even sound like Hannibal. For the first time, Will sees the last few years flashing through his mind through Hannibal's perspective; every longing look, every hesitant, steady touch, every time he believed that Will had chosen him, had looked his way with something more than anger or indifference, every single time he thought that maybe, *just maybe*, he wasn't the only one dealing with the heartbreaking consequences of falling in love with the person you shouldn't.

You've been waiting so long, he thinks, both grateful and sorry at once.

The answer doesn't need much thought.

Will pulls Hannibal down slightly to his height and presses their foreheads together. Hannibal makes some sort of wounded sound in his throat, hands coming up to grab at Will's waist in a bruising grip as if he's afraid this moment will evaporate.

Will strokes at his jaw, allowing, for the night, for his built-up resentment to fall down the drain with the water. They have *loads* to talk about and so, *so* many wounds to heal, but there will be time for that later. Right now, Will's only goal is to show Hannibal Lecter that he *has* made his decision on what he wants and who he wants, and there is only one way to give this particular gift. This is the only barrier they have yet to break between them.

"*Yes.*" He breathes as he crushes their lips together for the first time, demolishing the last wall.

Kissing Hannibal is something the Gods would write about with envy. He responds like a wild animal; growls and teeth and the strength of a beast like he's starving for Will's touch. He's all over Will, hands skimming his face, his arms and chest, his throat, his back. It's pensive and desperate, being too afraid to stop, but too overwhelmed to know what to do. He attacks Will's mouth with a skilled tongue, the sensation making Will lightheaded. No wonder Alana was head-over-heels if Hannibal kissed her like *this*.

Hannibal's body has come alive too. His cock is hard and actually stabbing Will's abdomen (the irony of which, is not lost on him), leaking down his skin nearly as much as Will is against him. Their bodies fit together so well, so *perfectly*, as if this was always meant to be.

The thought makes Will feel slightly giddy. *Meant to be.*

He kisses his way down Hannibal's throat and begins to suck bruises into the skin, savoring the hitched moan that blesses his ears. "I don't mean to rush you..." Will murmurs, pausing

his trailing hand right over Hannibal's lower belly just to feel the muscles twitch. "But, we do have a Dragon after us."

Hannibal nods, suddenly pushing Will back and knocking the shower door open so that he can pull them away.

The sheets are damp with water, sweat, and oil. The evidence of their love will be all over the bed when Jack finds this place, long after they've gone and started over somewhere new. The FBI will hear the echos of Will's whimpering moans and Hannibal's growls when they step foot in the room, and they will know. They will be unable to deny what took place.

Let them know. Let them know I was brave and true to myself in the very end. Let their image of me be soured. It doesn't matter.

Nothing matters but him. Nothing matters but this.

Will doesn't think of Jack. He doesn't think of Molly. He doesn't think of Chiyoh or Abigail or the Great Red Dragon. All he thinks of is the man above him who's holding him down, who insisted that they face one another so that he can see Will's face, who gives and gives and gives, barely letting Will time to breathe during this period of worship.

Hannibal fucks like he kills; he's brutal and savage while also kind, graceful and dangerous, and *perfect*. When the initial stretch makes tears spring to Will's eyes, Hannibal brushes them away with careful, adoring touches. He cradles Will's face, grips his throat, presses his palm to Will's scarred abdomen to feel the tremors as he thrusts harder and deeper, hungry for touch. For connection.

Will's body is strung tight with the pleasure that builds low in his gut, blinded by the fireworks every time Hannibal's cock brushes against his prostate. With Hannibal, Will makes sounds he's never made before; low-pitched, breathy moans, gasps that could also be sobs... he even babbles whenever Hannibal says his name, telling him how good it feels, how much he loves it, how much he wants this, wants Hannibal, *"I want you, I choose you, I need you, please, Hannibal, please."*

"Stai con me sempre." Hannibal murmurs against Will's lips, gripping his hair with one hand and using the other to lace their fingers together. *"Ti amo. Lo voglio stare con te."*

Will doesn't know enough Italian for a direct translation, but he can feel the meaning in his heart.

He isn't ready to say it back, at least, not out loud, but he pulls Hannibal in for a kiss and tries to say it without words. *I love you*, he presses into Hannibal's skin. *I love you, and I'm here.*

They come together, gripped tight by their other half, gasping into each other's mouths and rocking through the aftershocks, not even letting go once they collapse.

Hannibal is a cuddler, Will learns. They haven't left the bed yet, even though they should because Dolarhyde is coming soon, but neither of them seems too pressed to leave their nest yet. Hannibal clings and presses kisses to his hairline, his cheeks, anywhere he can reach, and Will begrudgingly allow it (while secretly purring under the affection). Honestly, Will feels more comfortable than he has in ages. He actually appreciates the Dragon for giving them time to have this.

"Did you ever consider contacting me in all that time?" Hannibal eventually asks, breaking the blissful post-coital daze. He sounds thoughtful and genuinely curious, even though it's possible he already knows the answer.

"It was uh... always in the back of my mind." Will croaks out, then clears his throat. There's no real point in lying about it. "Sometimes it was more difficult than others."

Hannibal hums, suddenly intrigued. "Tell me."

I hate when you do that, he sighs internally. How can he begin to narrow it down? Does he tell the tale of the beginning of their separation, before Abigail came back to him, how he almost broke down and called out of pure necessity, how he didn't know how to survive this life and wanted to take back his mistake?

Does he talk about the night before his wedding, how he lay in a cold, empty bed while Molly spent the night with some friends? How he stared up at the ceiling and traced the ring on his finger and felt so, so, so *wrong*?

Or does he talk about Sean McCoy? Does he mention how after Abigail finally went to bed in the wee hours of the morning how he stared at his phone and tried not to call just to tell Hannibal what he'd done?

And beyond the bigger events, there were the smaller days, like holidays or birthdays, or the anniversary of the day they met, or the night that everything fell apart. All of those days, every single one, the idea of picking up the phone was at the forefront of his thoughts.

In the end, Will goes for the best answer he has, one that isn't too soul-bearing, but is still more honest and vulnerable than the Will of the past would share with Hannibal.

"Once, um... Abi got sick. Really sick. Fever of 104, hallucinations, she couldn't hold anything down. I took her to the ER, but she... she was very sick." Talking about it still makes Will feel slightly ill himself. The sight of his daughter in that bed, so small and sick and weak... he shivers in Hannibal's arms and they tighten around him considerably. "I was going out of my mind in that hospital room."

Hannibal nods in understanding. He actually looks unsettled by this, or at least, he's trying to be for Will. "That is severe. You must have been very worried for her."

God, was he ever. "I was angry too. I couldn't... I couldn't *help* her, couldn't *do* anything for her. All I could do was... *sit there* while she..." His voice cuts off, suddenly thick with emotion when he remembers the helplessness he felt then. It was suffocating. "But I knew

uh... that you could. Help her. Or, at least, y-you being a doctor, you'd know what to do. And I...I almost called."

"Why didn't you?"

"My wife walked in. Imagine how that might have looked."

Hannibal doesn't answer him this time, suddenly looking like a storm cloud has taken over his mind, and Will suddenly feels anxious. Mentioning Molly coming between them, even in the past tense, may have been too much too soon. Even if Will has chosen Hannibal (and he *has*), Hannibal may not be willing to let Will's family go so soon. Will would never allow Hannibal to go after them, but when has the Devil ever listened to reason? They will have to speak about that later.

However, Will isn't willing to start this first night with them cross at one another. After tonight, they can argue and scream at each other all they want, safely, far away in another country. Not right now. Tonight is about them. It's about *this*.

"I have something else I need to tell you." He blurts.

Hannibal looks back at him and the storm cloud passes as if Will is the waking sun. "Yes?"

"I uh... Back when I first got her back, we had a break-in."

Hannibal suddenly looks *very* interested. His eyes brighten with blood and excitement, eager to know.

"Guy with a twisted religious vendetta against me came to us in the middle of the night. He was expecting just me, but he... he knew Abigail too, and he tried to go after her. He wanted to kill us both."

"Tell me. What did you do?"

"I killed him." He answers simply. "He ran at her and... I just *lost* it. I severed his spinal, then I broke his neck."

The energy coming off of Hannibal now is intoxicating—he looks so proud in this moment. One of his hands strokes down Will's chest, coming to rest over his racing heart. "Where was this?" He asks, still caressing like he can't get enough of the feeling of Will's skin.

"Wolf Trap."

"The perfect place to dispose of a body." Hannibal's eyes glint down at him with an unmistakable *knowing*. "Unless, of course, your approach was more... *satisfying*."

Will smiles, unsure if the pride he feels is his own or Hannibal's, but talking about this is suddenly so much easier. It no longer feels like a weight on his shoulders, like a dirty secret he has to keep. It just feels like another adventure he needs to share with someone who understands. "It was Abigail's idea."

Hannibal smirks as if to say *'of course it was'*, and he looks almost as proud as Will feels. "How did it feel to eat him? The man who threatened you and your child?"

"Righteous. Powerful." *Beautiful*. "Now that I'm here, uh... it's hard to imagine that I spent another two and a half years seeking out something else."

Beside him, Hannibal goes very still. His smirk has faded, replaced by a very thoughtful, slightly hopeful look.

"I don't regret getting married. I don't regret trying to move on from you." Will says quickly, just to get it out. He doesn't regret these things, so it isn't a lie. "I do regret that I didn't see how doomed it was until it was too late."

"That is an interesting choice of phrase;" Hannibal notes softly. He strokes softly down the side of Will's face as he speaks, careful and appreciative as if Will is a beautiful work of art instead of a giant mess. *"Doomed."*

Will chuckles a little breathlessly, feeling a little dumbstruck with the amount of affection making his heart swell. "You sound like a Bond villain when you say it."

It's Hannibal's turn to laugh, and this time, he leans down to capture Will's lips in a kiss that sends sparks down his spine. They kiss languidly, almost lazy in the afterglow of their first time together. Will's hands wander to caress Hannibal's shoulders and tangle in his damp blonde strands and Hannibal responds in kind—he cradles Will's face in his palm and strokes at the stubble on his jaw, moving his tongue against Will's own. A shiver passes through Will's body at all of the new sensations.

They should have done this ages ago. Their chemistry would break the scientific community if they could study it.

Hannibal finally lets him breathe before things become too intense to stop, but it's clear by the way he maneuvers Will to rest against his chest and continues to hold him close that he isn't willing to move away just yet. Will isn't ready to face reality yet either, so he just settles into Hannibal's warm, comforting embrace that feels like home and lets himself be in love.

The silence doesn't last long though. Hannibal breaks it first.

"Did you say goodbye to your wife, Will?"

It cuts right through the middle and makes him wince. "No." Will admits, unable to look up at him. "I didn't know what to say to her. I looked into her eyes the last time we spoke. She was telling me it would take some time, but soon we would be going home and we... we would figure it out. But in her eyes, I could tell, it would never be the same. You severed us. You do that a lot to me, actually."

Hannibal doesn't deny it.

"I went into her hospital room, told her I was sending Abigail to Florida to be with her sister, said that I was going to catch Dolarhyde, then I kissed her goodbye. And I left."

Molly hadn't said anything really. She told him to have Abigail call him when she got to Florida, she told him to be careful. She had kissed him back, but Will could tell that she felt torn. Molly loved him but her axis had shifted in the opposite direction. It wasn't enough. It would never be enough. Just like Molly would never be to Will what Hannibal is.

"Almost polite." Hannibal whispers, echoing another painful memory.

Will nods slowly and grips him tighter. "Almost."

"I'm going to film your death, Dr. Lecter, as dying, you meld with the strength of the Dragon."

"It's a glorious and rather discomfoting idea."

"Watching the film will be wonderful, but not as wonderful as the act itself."

Dolarhyde subtly unclicks the knife just as Hannibal's eyes dart back to Will's, and the thinly concealed desperation on his face makes Will's blood simmer and bubble. Will can see him questioning everything; the shower and then their lovemaking that followed, his own blind desire to trust that Will has chosen him, wants him, *loves him back*.

I won't let him do this to you. Will tells him with a look as he reaches for his gun. *No one is allowed to kill you but me.*

The Dragon twists his body and Will takes a step back, but he doesn't expect the knife to the face. He lets out a garbled cry as he's literally lifted from the floor by the blade in his jaw and white-hot pain explodes under his skin. He hears a low growl from Hannibal on the floor, but the sound is suddenly caught off and far away.

Will's body sails through the open window and rolls across the pavement. He's panicked and half-blind from the pain and the shock, but he doesn't stop fighting to get to his feet, not even Dolarhyde grabs him from behind. The blade is still stuck in his face.

Despite the pain, Will pulls the knife from his face and buries it in the Dragon's side. All too soon, before Will can scramble away, Dolarhyde turns the weapon on him again and stabs him again in the chest. He holds Will's throat and yanks his head back, ready to remove the knife and slice his throat.

And suddenly, against all odds, Hannibal is there. Will only sees him for a split second over the Dragon's impressive frame, latched to his back and keeping him in a chokehold before Dolarhyde throws him off, sending him rolling toward the rocks and leaving a trail of blood behind.

Eyes on his true prize, the Dragon follows Hannibal Lecter.

Will watches his monster struggle to escape, watches the Dragon ready himself to kill what Will loves most in this world, and the sight evokes a sense of power that he has never felt before.

For the second time this night, Will pulls the blade from his body, forces down his pain, and gets to his feet.

Everything turns to blood.

Their battle is like something from a fantasy novel; a powerful beast against a hardened army of two. He and Hannibal dance around the Dragon as they tear him apart, It's coordinated without a plan, lethal, and maybe lucky. The more blood pools down onto the concrete, the more alive Will Graham feels.

Significantly weakened, the Dragon roars. His face contorts with fangs and fire and the rage in his eyes burns holes into Will's skin, but then he looks beyond Dolarhyde's shoulder and sees Hannibal watching him. That heated gaze holds Will to Earth better than gravity.

With that one shared look, they become victorious.

Hannibal jumps on the Dragon's wings, jerking his head back just as Will pushes off the ground and falls to his knees at the monster's feet. He plunges the blade into the Dragon's flesh and tears him open. Will watches Hannibal's powerful, sharp teeth sink into Dolarhyde's throat. The skin tears audibly as the blood pours down his front and coats them in a spray.

The Dragon collapses, vanquished at last.

The world is quiet except for the sound of the ocean and their choked, heaving breaths. Adrenaline pumps through Will's veins like the ultimate painkiller, keeping him awake and present enough to comprehend what he's just done.

They did it. They really did it.

And not only did they kill him, but they *survived*.

Both of them.

We did it, Abi.

An almost giddy feeling passes through Will's body as he pushes himself to his knees and stares at the blood coating his arms. He's struck with a rapturous revelation.

"It really does look black in the moonlight." He says in awe.

Hannibal takes his hand and pulls him to his feet, holding him in his arms while the sea crashes against the cliffside below them. Their faces are inches apart, and through the exhaustion, Hannibal stares down at Will like he's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen in his entire life. The long-awaited treasure that he's been searching for and finally has.

"See? This is all I ever wanted for you, Will." He murmurs, voice thick with emotion. "For both of us."

God, how could Will have ever let go of this? Now that they've done it, done *all of this*, it seems impossible that he could ever want anything else. He wants to say so much, how it made him feel, how glorious it was, but in the end, Will is so tired that he can only say the truth in two words.

"It's beautiful."

And so they stand, grasping one another for dear life, lips hovering just centimeters apart, and Will just rests his head on Hannibal's chest. His heart thunders loud in Will's ears, signifying how *alive* they both are. He pulls Hannibal's other arm around his waist and he goes willingly, resting his cheek against Will's blood-soaked curls, breathing him in.

It's the single most perfect moment of Will's entire life, next to the first time he and Hannibal touched just hours ago, and seeing Abigail step out of Jack's SUV.

A sudden thought occurs to him, and he tenses in Hannibal's arms. "The camera..." He rasps.

"I know."

There is a long, pregnant pause. Hannibal's tone suggests that he is handing control back to Will, allowing him to make whatever decision he needs.

They could walk away. They could take the camera and destroy it, keep the tape to watch just to relive this moment over and over.

But, even as Will is thinking this, he tosses the idea aside. They do not need the evidence of their power, they can relive it themselves, vividly, and can create new masterpieces elsewhere. They will have battle scars to trace their fingers over and remember this night. The camera can remain there with the Dragon's body and the abandoned squad car in the driveway, and when Jack watches the tape, he will see their glory and their defeat.

They will be safe. No one will look.

Will wraps his arms around Hannibal's neck as tight as he can. "*I love you.*" He breathes. "Hold onto me."

"Forever."

And then, they fall.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Hello hello! So, SO sorry for the long delay on this. I had family stuff going on and then had like NO motivation to write this, but I hope this makes up for your wait!! Love you guys!!
Canary <3

Abigail's first thought when the plan to get Hannibal out was mentioned, was a boat. One directly to Cuba where the FBI couldn't follow, but, apparently that is easier said than done. Chiyoh, who is quickly becoming Abigail's new favorite person, did not magically have an escape boat on hand and it would be something they would have to procure on their own. That was a problem, but not an impossible task.

Instead, Chiyoh brought an old asset of Hannibal's own collection to the party—a nondescript blue work van with a makeshift ambulance bay in the rear where the lack of windows would give them a certain amount of privacy until they got further south where Hannibal had a separate safe house property. *"It would be safer for them to remain close by until the police presence has cleared a little. Agent Crawford wouldn't expect them to stay in the country if he believes them to be alive."*

And as anxious as the thought makes her, Abigail knows Chiyoh is right. Fleeing the country at a moment's notice is challenging, even for someone like Hannibal Lecter, especially if two out of the three family members are injured.

Neither woman was under the delusion that Hannibal and Will would take down Dolarhyde unscathed, so they got as close to the water as the van would allow in hopes that they would at least be close by. Once they couldn't find them in the water, they decided to walk along the beach. They're here. Abigail can feel it.

She's mostly just relieved her intuition was correct and that Hannibal did take Will to the cliff house for this particular showdown.

Abigail searches the area with a watchful eye, clutching the handgun that Chiyoh gave her tight in her palm and her torch in the other. Her heart thuds painfully against her ribcage and her stomach feels tight with nervous energy. *This is taking too long*, she thinks a little desperately. *They should be here. They must be.*

"Panicking will do no good." Chiyoh tells her, gentle but authoritative.

"I'm not panicking," Abigail argues, even though it's a lie. "I know they're okay."

She does know. Her family can survive anything, but the idea of them being hurt and on their own right now is frightening. That fear propels her forward, ready to search through the night and drag the water her goddamn self if it comes down to it. Abigail Graham *will* find her family if it's the last thing she does on this Earth.

And should Jack Crawford or the Great Red Dragon find her first, she'll put a bullet into each of them. Quick, cold, and deserving.

The minutes stretch on and feel like hours the longer they search to no avail. The first inklings of doubt are beginning to stir in Abigail's blood, but just as she is about to go back the way they came and search the other direction when a darkened, huddled mass comes into view a few hundred yards away. Her breath catches in her throat.

The mass separates into two, a broad figure leaning over a smaller frame as if protecting it. There is no mistaking them.

"There they are! I see them!" Abigail shouts, breaking into a run. "Dad! Hannibal!"

Her father is lying on his back in Hannibal's lap, unconscious and unresponsive. Hannibal is bent over him, keeping his head elevated and two fingers pressed against the pulse point housed in his throat.

Panic grips Abigail tightly at the sight. *No. No, not him, please.*

"Dad!" She drops to her knees beside Hannibal and hovers her hands over Will's body, terrified to touch and feel him cold. "Dad, oh *God*. Dad—"

Hannibal reaches out and touches her arm, snapping her attention to him. "He will be alright." He says soothingly. "He has a strong heartbeat."

She reaches out and curls her fingers over the pulse point in Will's wrist, feeling for the steady beating of his heart. She nearly goes dizzy with relief. *He's okay. He's okay. He's okay.*

"What about you?" Abigail asks. Her eyes fall to the gaping, blood-soaked wound in Hannibal's stomach and she feels her blood go cold. "Jesus, Hannibal!" She gasps, grabbing for his sweater. "Chiyoh! Hannibal's been shot!"

His large hand seizes her wrist in a gentle grip. "I am alright for now. We need to move Will first."

Abigail stares at him for a moment, just taking in the sight of Hannibal Lecter, free and finally with them after all this time. Looking at him now, hearing the concern in his voice for Will, the way his voice is calm and hard, urging her to listen and trust him... it's surreal. It parallels a memory, one she'll never forget as long as she's alive—the night she took her first life and Hannibal had come to the rescue with a steady command; "*Abigail. Show me what happened.*"

Speaking of...

“Did you kill the Dragon?”

Hannibal’s eyes glint in the moonlight, and a pained smile pulls at his lips. “Yes.”

It isn’t just relief and joy that bubble up inside Abigail’s chest at the confirmation; it’s *pride*. “Good.” She says. And she means it.

Chiyoh steps up behind Abigail, hands still cradling her rifle, but the pinched expression on her face softens to fondness when Hannibal’s own smile broadens.

“Hello, Chiyoh.”

She dips her head, then gives a short command in Japanese that goes over Abigail’s head and slings her gun over her shoulder. Hannibal is already moving, slowly adjusting to a crouched position before he slides his arms under Will’s arms. Abigail helps with his legs while Chiyoh helps to steady Hannibal and together, they trudge slowly through the sand toward Chiyoh’s fake ambulance at the edge of the beach.

Chiyoh orders Hannibal to stay put while she and Abigail load Will’s deadweight onto the stretcher so as to not make the gunshot wound worse. He complies only out of necessity; the way he shifts around on the second stretcher, cranes his neck around, and keeps his eyes fixated on her father’s face make that very clear. Hannibal doesn’t get *nervous*, per se, but this restless energy speaks volumes to how he’s feeling now.

The livid bite mark on his throat and the littered bruises below do not speak; they scream.

They scream as loudly as the missing wedding band from her father’s finger.

Her heart swells for the both of them, happy that they took the plunge (no pun intended), but then reality hits her like a truck.

Oh, God, they’re going to be all over each other. All the time.

Oh, no. That’s... ew. No.

Abigail feels a blush raise to her cheeks and she averts her eyes. *Knowing* your parents are intimate is very, *very* different than seeing the evidence face-to-face.

Maybe I should buy two houses.

She shakes her head to clear those images like an Etch-a-Sketch and takes the suture kit so that she can stitch her father’s cheek closed. Behind her, Chiyoh is helping Hannibal with the gunshot wound; she can hear his pained little groan when she begins prodding at the damaged tissue in order to clean it. The whole van smells like blood.

“Agent Crawford is still at the crash scene,” Chiyoh says finally.

Abigail throws a grin over her shoulder at Hannibal, who is looking a little worse for wear now that there’s a needle in his stomach. His face is pale and covered in a thin sheen of sweat, but he catches her gaze regardless. “We passed him on the way. How crazy is that?”

Hannibal manages to smile. “He will need a helicopter to find what’s left of the Great Red Dragon, and it will take him some time to uncover what has become of Will and me.” He replies, sounding more coherent than he should.

At this point, Chiyoh asks her to take over stitching Hannibal up so that she can begin their drive. She pushes her panic and inexperience down and allows Hannibal’s calm voice to instruct her. It goes as well as one would expect in the back of a moving van, but thankfully, Hannibal is patient.

“There we go.” She says as she ties off the end of the stitches around Hannibal’s stomach. “That should hold until we get to... wherever we’re going.”

Hannibal nods slowly. He’s exhausted. “Thank you, Abigail.”

She sheds her bloody gloves and leans back against the metal wall, regarding both of her parents carefully. Will is still very unconscious but breathing, his heart is beating, and he’s alive. That’s really all she cares about at this point.

Well, that, and making sure that he stays that way while they make their escape. *Both* of them.

Abigail looks up and finds Hannibal watching her with that same familiar fondness from their confrontation in the hospital. It isn’t threatening, but it unsettles her nonetheless. He always sees too much. “Jack will know that you ran.” She says instead of calling him on it.

“The Dragon’s passion for filmmaking came in handy.” He counters, slurring his words just a little. “When they watch the footage, they will be able to see me and Will going over the cliff. They will drag the water, but they will have no reason to believe that we are alive.”

“And I’ll have just disappeared.” She adds, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth. “It might make Jack suspect...”

“Potentially. A problem for later, I suppose. There is no reason to worry about that just now.”

Abigail scoffs. Hannibal’s confidence is somehow aggravating and comforting all at once. “How the *hell* are you still conscious? How are you still *talking*?”

“I do not experience pain as normal people do.”

“God, you *are* Michael Myers.” She jokes. The answering look of confusion on his face is nearly comical, so she lowers her voice and says with no small amount of drama: “*The killer always comes back for one more scare.*”

This time, Hannibal cracks a smile. “You are nearly as rude as your father is.”

Abigail smirks, but it slowly fades when she glances over at Will, who looks too still despite the rise and fall of his chest. “Are you sure he’s going to be okay?” She asks, her voice wavering.

“Yes,” Hannibal says immediately. “Very sure.”

It doesn't sound whimsical or just blind hope; he seems to actually believe it, and given his knowledge, Abigail accepts this answer with a nod. She wouldn't let anything happen to her Dad, and she knows that at this point, Hannibal wouldn't either.

"Hannibal..." She begins before she can stop herself. "I need to ask you something. I want you to tell me the truth. The *real* truth."

Hannibal blinks to indicate he's heard her.

"After you tried to kill me and you thought I was dead... did you only regret it because of... because of my Dad? Did you only regret it because it drove him away?"

For a moment, he's very silent. His expression is tightened by pain, making it hard to decipher how he really feels. Then, finally, he manages to say: "At first."

And it hurts. It cuts deep like his blade against her throat had, but she's grateful for his honesty. "Did you ever... Did you miss me?" She swallows hard against the lump in her throat. "At all?"

"Frequently."

"Then why did you send Dolarhyde to kill me?"

"Because I knew that you would survive."

Abigail's head snaps up. Anger flares through her entire body and she fixes him with a glare. "No, you didn't. *You* barely survived him. He was bigger, stronger, and he was armed. I was in my pajamas. You had *no idea* I was going to live."

Hannibal narrows his eyes, but she holds her ground. He looks almost impressed when he says: "Your sense of self-preservation is severely heightened, Abigail. You have always fought fiercely to protect your own life. If you could not kill him, you would improvise to ensure you were able to flee, which, if you recall, you did." He smiles, pleased and unrestrained. "What a clever girl you are. I am very proud of you."

"You gambled with my life and you got lucky." She counters, not ready to forgive him just yet. "You *always* do."

"I was also aware that Will would make you strong enough to survive. His love for you is complex while uncomplicated, and that is what you needed to be brave."

This gives her anger pause. It isn't an apology, but she can hear the acknowledgment for what it is—Hannibal admitting to being wrong about what was good for her without really saying anything at all.

It fixes nothing. It doesn't mend what Hannibal has done to her repeatedly, what he's done to her father, but she's smart enough to know he could never regret the path he's taken. In Hannibal's mind, this was all necessary to be where they are now; together and running far from Jack Crawford, the FBI, and everyone who wants them dead.

It fixes nothing, but it's enough for now.

"Don't hurt him anymore." She pleads, keeping her gaze on him hard and defiant. "Promise me."

Hannibal's eyes glint in the darkness of the van. He's clearly wounded by the insinuation, but she's sure it has less to do with hurt feelings due to their fragile sense of trust and everything to do with the idea of actually hurting Will again. As if to confirm, he nods and murmurs; "I have no desire to hurt you or Will. I promise."

He sounds like he means it. Of course, she doesn't truly know, one can never be certain with Hannibal Lecter. She just has to accept what she's offered for now. Perhaps, in time, Abigail will believe him wholeheartedly. *Again.*

When she looks back at her father, a ruthless onslaught of emotion floods her mind and body. It's hard to see him in such a weakened state, so bloody and bruised and carved. Will has been her strength for so long and now that he needs her... she feels out of her depth, and it's frightening.

The idea of losing him now... losing *either* of them after all of this...

She doesn't want to think about it.

"Do you still dream about your first father?" Hannibal asks, apropos of nothing.

Startled by the left-field question, she has to pause before answering. She *does* dream about *him* still, but not nearly as often as she used to. Often times they're memories, but there are some dreams where he stands at the back of the room watching her and beaconing her toward him. He'll sneer at her with his milky, death-tainted eyes and reach out with decaying hands as if to curse her where she stands for her betrayal, and each time, she plants herself defiantly in between them and vocally, forcefully, *definitively* chooses Will Graham instead.

Abigail shrugs a little awkwardly, unsure how to say any of that, and mumbles out a rather vague, unimpressive "*sometimes*".

"Does he still frighten you there?"

"Not anymore." She says, feeling like she could laugh at the thought if she wasn't so worn. "He's afraid of me."

Hannibal hums, seeming pleased with her answer. "How does that make you feel?"

"Sad sometimes, because there is a part of me that will always love him, but mostly I feel good. He knew he was going to be caught, but whether it happened when it did or a year later, the outcome would have been the same. He always intended for me to die before I could live. I'm stronger than he ever was. I never would have been able to thrive with him, even if we had never gotten caught."

There is a pause that lasts so long that Abigail has to look up to make sure that Hannibal is still conscious, but she finds herself stuck when she finds him staring with that same blazing

intensity as before. It feels like *pride*. “I tried to teach you that.” He says. “Do you remember?”

“It started there. What you made me do to him.”

“And then it grew.”

She holds back a shudder when the memories of her father’s grey corpse sitting in Hannibal’s office chair come flooding back. She doesn’t deny that it was effective in the message he was delivering. “*You must understand that blood and breath are only elements undergoing change to fuel your radiance, just as the source of fire is burning.*” She quotes, hearing Will’s voice echoing the words in her mind.

Hannibal chuckles. “Did your Dad teach you that?”

Smiling, Abigail nods. “Get some sleep. You need it.”

But Hannibal’s eyes are already closed, and within minutes, his breathing evens out as he finally allows himself to rest. He’s gotten them this far.

Will finally wakes about thirty minutes later with a strangled, pained gasp of Hannibal’s name. Abigail rushes back to his side the second he tries to sit up and presses her palm against his uninjured shoulder to keep him lying down. “Dad. *Dad*, it’s me. It’s okay!” She tries.

Will’s eyes search for her in the dim light, wide and hazy and unseeing until he reaches up and touches her cheek. “*Abigail.*” His voice sounds rough and garbled due to the stitches in his face, but there’s no mistaking the emotion there.

She smiles brightly as relieved tears spring to the corners of her eyes. *He’s okay, he’s alive*, she thinks, clutching at his hand. “I’m here. It’s me.”

“Where... Where is he?”

“He’s here. He’s sleeping.” She moves slightly out of the way so that he can see Hannibal passed out on the opposite table.

Satisfied, Will drops his head back down onto the table and looks her up and down instead with unfocused, glassy eyes. He’s clearly in pain. “You... okay?”

“Yeah, Daddy, I’m okay,” Abi assures him, squeezing his hand in her own so he can feel it. He smiles as much as he can with a slashed cheek. “You should have let me meet Chiyoh sooner.” She adds. “She’s kind of a badass. I guess she’s like my Aunt now, and that’s really cool. She said she’d teach me some Japanese if I wanted.”

“You sure you got... enough room up there for more languages?” He tries to say. Leave it to him to tease her while they’re in a life-or-death situation.

Abigail glares playfully down at him. “Are you saying I have a small head, or are you calling me stupid?”

“Small head. Adjusted the strap on my... my fishing hat. I couldn’t... couldn’t even fit it over my ear.”

“Shut up. You always fuck up my rearview mirror.”

“Language.”

She can’t help but laugh. He’s trying to comfort her, she knows. He can always tell when she’s anxious. It makes her heart hurt.

He going to fall asleep again soon. He seems to be fighting it, which is bad for his recovery, especially so soon, so Abigail leans down and presses a kiss to his cheek. “It’s okay, Dad. Sleep.” He makes a noise of protest, which she ignores. “I’ll take care of you guys. You know I will.”

Will visibly relaxes after that and closes his eyes. “Love you...” He murmurs.

Her throat goes tight. “I love you, Dad. I’m mad at you, but I’m glad you’re safe.”

He’s already asleep.

Turns out, Hannibal’s safehouse wasn’t in another state at all; it was in southern Virginia near the border of North Carolina, so they did not have to travel far.

Abigail had understood why they had to remain in the country for a short time but had balked at the idea of still being in the same state as Jack Crawford and the FBI. Nonetheless, when they pulled up to the small, secluded cabin, she assisted Chiyoh in bringing their charges inside and into the large king-size bed on the first floor. She’s taken to sleeping on the sofa in the living room to keep close to them if they needed her, which, unfortunately, has been fairly often.

It’s been a week since they all came together, and Abigail has to admit that she’s tired. Not as tired as her parents are, but she only sleeps in two-hour increments at night, making sure she’s up to administer medications, change bandages, or anything else.

Hannibal is her biggest concern; they’ve managed to keep his gunshot wound from infection so far, but there is still a significant risk, considering he’s mostly delirious and keeps accidentally pulling his stitches. Will had sustained less damage, but he’s been susceptible to fevers and vertigo since he had encephalitis, which is coming back to bite him now. Mostly, they do nothing but sleep.

Chiyoh has proven to be a Jack-of-all-trades much like her cousin; Abigail has learned more about medicine and emergency first-aid in the last week than she ever had, but she remembers every piece of information she learns and barely needs to rely on Chiyoh for caregiving anymore. Chiyoh has done enough.

She procured Abigail a new phone which, as of late, has been used only for the twenty different alarms set for her parents' various needs throughout the day. It's ten-thirty which means it's time to switch the IVs.

Abigail switches the fluids for both of them with practiced ease. Neither man stirs while she works, either because they're too tired or they've gotten used to her care by now. She checks catheters (which is a little gross, but not unmanageable), takes their temperatures, then disposes of her gloves and heads into the adjoining bathroom to clean up.

She's just about done when she hears Chiyoh urgently calling her name from down the hall. Her tone sounds very grave.

The television is on in the living room when Abigail gets there, and it only takes one look at Chiyoh's stern face to tell her that something is wrong.

"Is..." Abigail swallows hard, suddenly terrified. "Is it Crawford?"

Chiyoh shakes her head, but Abigail isn't looking at her anymore. Her eyes have found the TV and the local news channel that's playing on it. Namely, the bulletin plastered in all caps across the bottom and the photo of a chilling, familiar face right above it.

MATTHEW BROWN ESCAPES BSHCI.

Abigail's whole body goes ice cold, either with shock or fear she isn't sure.

It's him. He looks younger in the photo, less unkempt than he had when they met just days ago, but Abigail takes in the dark, knowing eyes, and the curl of his lips, and there's no doubt in her mind that it's the prisoner from the hospital.

Matthew Brown.

She knows his name; Will spoke about him once and told her of his... *involvement* in her father's court case and how he attempted to murder Hannibal on Will's behalf. She remembers the fresh scars dawning Hannibal's wrists when he came to visit her at the cliff house a few days later, though Hannibal had been rather vague on the details.

And now... now he was out.

Out, free, *missing*, just like the three of them.

"It's only been one week since the Tooth Fairy, Francis Dolarhyde, was found murdered atop a cliffside house and controversial FBI profiler Will Graham disappeared alongside his adopted daughter, Abigail Hobbs, and the infamous Chesapeake Ripper, Dr. Hannibal Lecter. The news reporter is saying.

Her heart begins to pound as shock gives way to fear. This could be bad. *Very* bad.

"Lecter and Graham are presumed to have fallen to their deaths in the Atlantic, though no bodies have been found. Abigail's current whereabouts are unknown, but it is said that she

was most likely Dolarhyde's last victim. However, there is a very new, very frightening development that has been another massive blow for the FBI.

"Matthew Brown, twenty-nine, was an inmate at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane who has a dark history with both Graham and Lecter. Hospital staff says that Brown was being transported to the hospital for a seizure-like episode, but overpowered his guards and escaped out the back of the ambulance. This begs the question; what has truly become of Lecter, Graham, and Abigail Hobbs? Is Brown's escape related? Is he seeking revenge? An alliance? At this point, it's anybody's guess."

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